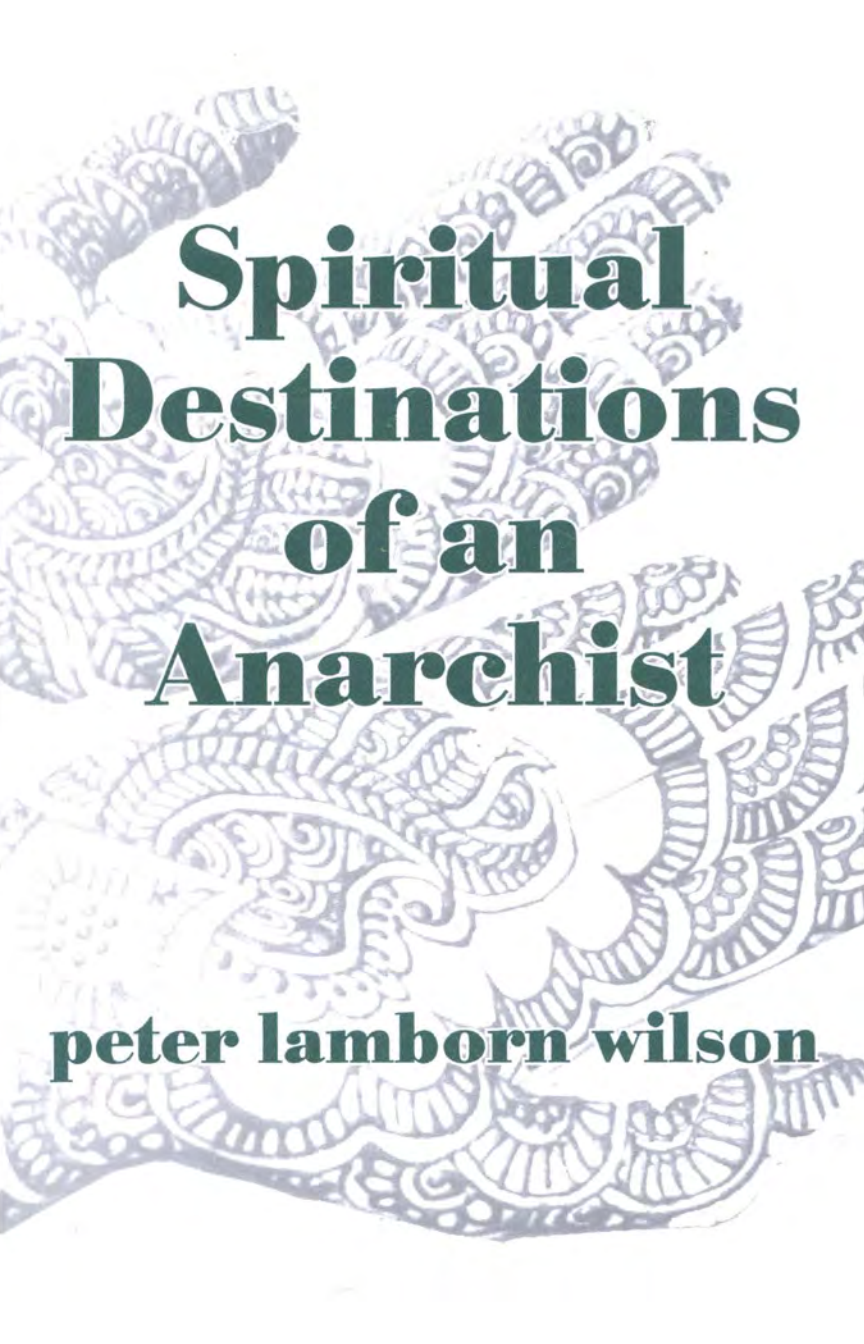




Spiritual Destinations of an Anarchist

peter lamborn wilson

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Chaos, Eros, Earth, and Old Night: Radical Neo-Hermeticism and Ecological Resistance

*That a great deal of belief must be present...—
that is the precondition of every living thing
and its life. Therefore, what is needed is that
something must be held to be true—not that
something is true.*

—Nietzsche¹

Prestidigitation

Nietzsche says we need an “illusion” to keep society going in the face of the breakdown threatening it through knowledge—the knowledge of existential vacuity, the displacement of “Man,” the death or silence of God, the terror of a freedom which is not an abstract idea but a fate. If we are to *invent* (a word which used to mean “find out”) such an illusion, then we should arrive at one which works, which is effective. This should be possible on the assumption that effective action

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 507/1887.

does not necessarily depend on truth, since truth does not exist in any literal sense, whereas effective action can be said to “exist” at least in some situational sense.

The Will to Power is in large part concerned with the question of action, which is what makes it so much more valuable to us now, unfinished as it is, than many of Nietzsche’s finished products. We don’t need his precise experiments (or even his basic axioms) so much as we need his methodology. The sections on art and love seem particularly powerful discussions of the possible utility of certain illusions (let’s call them “myths” to escape the usual connotations of futility connected with the word “illusion”). To take Nietzsche at his word is to envision a society of free spirits devoted to art and love and the transformation of the social element, simply because they—from the superabundance of life in them—find such play to be a challenging and joyful action.

Interesting as we may find such an image, Nietzsche’s method for arriving at it holds more interest for us now than the image itself. In searching for an image which could bring

action into being (so to speak), Nietzsche went back beyond the Enlightenment to Natural Magic as propounded by the Renaissance he so admired. In Natural Magic, as Ioan P. Couliano points out,² we find a program for deploying the imaginal process to bring about individual and social transformation. The following proposal arises from methodology derived from *The Will to Power* in the light of recent reading on the history of Hermeticism or Natural Magic in the Renaissance and after.³

The Reality Wars

If we're searching for a myth that might be effective, we should perhaps hesitate to ransack an epistemological system—Natural Magic—that has been so thoroughly debunked and abandoned by modern science and philosophy. And in fact we should certainly exercise extreme caution in dealing with both the supernatural and the ideological claims of

2 Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

3 See Thomas Frick, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1986), a collection of old and new texts on the Hermetic and neo-Hermetic theory of the Earth which I found invaluable in preparing this article.

Renaissance magic, lest our project decay at once into some form of romantic reaction or New Age fantasy. What interests us is not the hoodoo aspects of magic (charming though they may be) but rather the role played by Hermeticism in the complex struggle for paradigm hegemony in seventeenth-century science.

The players in this game included (1) the Baconians or proponents of experimentalism; (2) the Cartesians or “Mechanick Philosophers”; (3) the Newtonians; and (4) the Hermeticists. Classical modern science, the winning paradigm, turned out to include elements from the first three systems but very little from the fourth. From Bacon it took the efficacy of experimentalism; from the Cartesians it took the image of the world and Nature as *dead matter*; from Newton it took the basic structure of classical physics, with its imagery of force, energy, gravity, dimensional space, and linear time (metaphors which influenced and facilitated the emerging ideology of capitalism).

From Hermeticism, however, science inherited nothing except a few odd and

accidental discoveries in chemistry, but no basic ideas, no major tropes. This is at least according to science's own official history of itself. Of course this legend is simply not true. Newton smuggled one central Hermetic concept into his system, that of "action at a distance," to explain gravity. He even used the Hermetic/erotic term for it: "attraction." But Newton never published his secret alchemical treatises, and for political reasons he disguised his debt to Hermetic science, thus perpetuating the decisive betrayal so incisively condemned by William Blake.

Blake was the last serious Hermetic radical. Newton and his allies opted for *real* power—the Royal Society—and turned their backs on the embarrassing enthusiasts and cabalistic conspirators of the Hermetic left. In doing so, they succeeded in swiping the Hermetic concept of attraction while utterly rejecting the Hermetic idea that had always seemed to accompany and even explain the mystery of action at a distance—the *idea of the animate world*.

According to Hermetic philosophy or Natural Magic, the world is alive, and

thus, like any living individual, can be said to have spiritual faculties such as intellect and imagination. Imagination is not simply the impotent fantasy of an ego locked inside a skull and able to influence the world only as a ghost in the machine; the Hermetic imagination is a force capable of acting at a distance through the subtle will-substance of attraction focused through images. This can be done because everything is alive and to some degree conscious. The world carries out this attraction (life attracts life), and the individual consciousness can accomplish the same thing (on a necessarily microcosmic level) through the practice of Natural Magic.

Newton's brilliant move was to accept the idea of action at a distance (gravity's "attraction") while denying that it could be considered in any way conscious or animate, or that it could possess a prolongation in the world as topocosm⁴ or in human consciousness as microcosm. Attraction was in fact "mechanical," even if it did not depend (as the Cartesians

4 Topocosm: place as mandala, landscape as microcosm, a term apparently invented by Theodore H. Gaster. See his *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950).

argued) on corpuscular activity in the aether.⁵ The world was indeed a clock, even if some of the springs were invisible or purely mathematical. (No wonder some of the Cartesians accused Newton of thinking like a wizard!)

Some science fiction writer should speculate about what modern science would have become if Hermeticism had won the paradigm battle of the seventeenth century. Perhaps such “strange” aspects of physics as the wave/particle theory of matter, uncertainty, Bell’s Theorem, and chaos theory, would have been discovered much earlier. Certainly we would have an advanced technology, for the Natural Magicians were no technophobes or Luddites. But it would be a technology based on the perception of the world as animate rather than dead; thus our science fiction writer is free to imagine an “appropriate,” biologically oriented, noninvasive technology, “green” and doubtlessly erotic, strong on life enhancement, consciousness studies, and

5 Some physicists are still searching for these corpuscles, now called “gravitons,” since even relativity and quantum mechanics do not rule out their existence. An interesting question: if they really exist, would it be necessary to accept that some sort of “aether” also exists?

ecology, and weak on Promethean, antihuman, wasteful, and destructive designs. A pleasant fantasy...But the purpose of the present essay is to ask whether it is perhaps not yet too late for such technology to come into being.

Hermeticists on the Living Earth

“Chaos was first made, and in that all the elements at one and the same instant; for the world was manifested and brought out of the Chaos like a chick out of an egg.”

To this Apollonius replied like a pure sophister: “And must I then think”—saith he—“that the world is a living creature?”

Saith Jarcas: “Yes, verily, if you reason rightly; for it giveth life to all things.”

“Shall we then”—saith Tyaneus—“call it a male or a female creature?”

“Both,”—saith the wise Brahmin [Jarcas]—for the world, being a compound of both faculties, supplies the office of father and mother in the generation of those things that have life.”

—Thomas Vaughan

(Eugenius Philalethes),

The Fraternity of the Rosy Cross

[The true magus,] abounding in the loftiest mysteries, embraces the deepest contemplation of the most secret things, and at last the knowledge of all nature. [The magus,] in calling forth into the light as if from their hiding-places the powers scattered and sown in the world by the loving-kindness of God, does not so much work wonders as diligently serve a wonder-working nature.

[The magus,] having more searchingly examined into the harmony of the universe, which the Greeks with greater significance call *sympátheia*, and having clearly perceived the reciprocal affinity of natures, and applying to each single thing the suitable and peculiar inducements...brings forth into the open the miracles concealed in the recesses of the world, in the depths of nature, and in the storehouses and mysteries of God, just as if she herself were their maker.

—Pico della Mirandola

Hair of the Dog

*When our spirit has been carefully prepared
and purged by natural things it is able to*

receive many gifts through the stellar rays, from the spirit of cosmic life. Cosmic life is visibly propagated in grasses and trees, which are like the hair of the body of earth; it is also revealed in stones and metals, which are like the teeth and bones of this body; it circulates in the living shells of the earth, which adhere to stones. By making frequent use of plants and other living beings it is possible to gain a great deal from the spirit of the world.

—Anonymous Hermeticist

If the world is a tree, then we are the blossoms.

—Novalis

The proposal: to revive the Hermetic myth of the living Earth as an effective means toward the radical transformation of scientific, technological, and indeed social paradigms; to counter utilitarianism, “progressism,” capitalism, and other destructive tendencies based on classical modern science (loosely defined as knowledge of the material world). In order to accomplish this, we ought to be able to show:

1. That the world view of Natural Magic is not simply delusive, and that it is open to

rectification by philosophical and critical theory.

2. That this critique could result in a new paradigm capable of offering a coherent analysis of “scientific facts”;
3. That this paradigm could prove effective, both as science and as myth, in a transformation of Nature.

In short, we need to show that the myth of the living world could be both necessary and sufficient to further the radical social project of “liberatory action” in the vital interface between technology and life, between culture and biosphere.

To deal with these points in order:

1. Philosophy since Nietzsche has more or less dissolved the nineteenth-century borders of rationality. “Reason” is no universal category but can only be defined in the context of a given consensus. We still have borders, of course, such as the one between the shrinking daylight world of the classical scientific worldview and the encroaching shadow of coincidence, shamanic consciousness, and the archaic wild(er)ness. There’s no need to redefine the world of shadow in terms of the

world of daylight or vice versa (although the stranger “facts” of quantum and chaos theory do sometimes seem to violate the border, smuggling something chthonic through the customs of rationality). Nor is there any need to consider either world “real” or “unreal” in some exclusive sense. Hans Peter Duerr points out (in his book *Dreamtime*)⁶ that one can keep a foot in both at once, on the level of experience, and thus be called “one who straddles the fence”—a term for witches or shamans in some cultures. Couliano shows that Hermeticism was just as “rational” as the Mechanick Philosophy in terms of the seventeenth-century consensus—maybe more so—and just as “rational” as modern science in terms of the twentieth-century consensus.

This does not mean that Hermetic science is as valid, useful, or correct as modern science in operational terms. It isn't. But the modern consensus paradigm has been shifted (especially by quantum and chaos) in a direction that makes the *philosophy* of Hermeticism look interesting again. It might even be said that

6 Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary Between Wilderness and Civilization* (New York: Blackwell, 1985).

Natural Magic provides more useful images for thinking about, say, Schrödinger's cat, than does classical Newtonian physics.

If Natural Magic is to be rectified in such a way as to resuscitate its usefulness, we should no doubt begin by ignoring the unprovable or disproved aspects of Hermetic science (alchemy, astrology, etc.)⁷ and concentrate instead on certain basic images, among them the central image of the living Earth.

2. Natural Magic rejects the escape clause of the supernatural as a means of explaining away its irreducible sense of amazement about the world. Bacon and Newton presumably felt this astonishment but managed to suppress it; the Cartesians abolished it altogether, and today's disenchanted power-parasitic scientists are their lineal descendants. But relativity, quantum theory, and chaos have revived amazement; in fact it may be impossible to

7 This is not meant to discourage research in such promising areas as traditional medicine and "plant wisdom," shamanic therapeutics and consciousness studies, or even certain aspects of alchemy. On the contrary, if Hermetic science is to be revived, it must deploy itself especially in those areas where it does indeed offer "hard" solutions—not only in order to benefit humanity but also to make propaganda for its new and rectified world view.

do any truly elegant science in these fields *without* such amazement—and the same could be said of brain-mind research, morphogenic field research, psychedelic studies, or other inherently “strange” disciplines.

The Hermetic science of the Renaissance did indeed depend on certain teleological axioms—and it is precisely the avoidance of teleology that since the seventeenth century has been taken to characterize all real science. Certainly if our myth is to satisfy the uneasy shade of Nietzsche it cannot make use of any such loopholes, whether crudely supernaturalist or subtly teleological. If we’re proposing a neo-Hermetic paradigm, we must find a mode of transition to this new world view that does not violate the older world view’s demands for coherence and falsification. A rectified Natural Magic must not indulge in special pleading, nor must it make appeals to irrationalism, romantic reaction, or nostalgia, or to a cynical relativism that would deny the value of all testing or thinking.

Here the work of certain contemporary scientists takes on a new luster, especially Ilya Prigogine’s investigations of creative evolu-

tion and the work of the Gaia scientists such as Lovelock and Margulis. In other words, rectified Natural Magic can be seen as compatible with the axioms and procedures of a science that will develop (and already is developing) the links between morphogenetics, chaos, cognitive studies, the biogeostucturalism of the Gaians, etc. This newly emerging paradigm also takes in social sciences as well as “soft” sciences such as ethnopharmacology, ecology, ethology, and even weather prediction. In short, our brand of Hermeticism is indeed equipped to become a paradigm in the full Kuhnian sense of the word.

3. But is it the paradigm we *want*? We know that classical science has been used to justify industrialization, capitalism, behaviorism, and the ravaging of the environment, mega-war—and we know we no longer want these things. But is there any reason to believe that a shift to a world view based on the image of the living earth will help us overcome the cultural and technological aspects of the old (and dying) world of Bacon, Descartes, and Newton?

Moreover, is there any reason to suppose that this image will encourage appropriate

technology, respect for wild(er)ness, a psychology of enhancement rather than control, or an economics that is neither capitalist nor communist but *human*? Will the living Earth return to us bearing the dusty reactionary luggage of Renaissance mumbo jumbo, a social order based on new forms of oppression (such as ecotopian fascism), or a mind science rooted in “magical” brainwashing rather than liberation? Can the image of the living Earth be considered in any way an inherently *radical* solution?

In seventeenth-century politics Hermeticism stood for radicalism and revolution, not for “medieval reaction.” Rosicrucianism and early Masonry can best be understood as radical Protestant political movements, and most of the extremist sects of that period were heavily influenced by the Hermetic world view. (The Family of Love is especially fascinating as a link between Behmenite mysticism and Renaissance occultism on the one hand and Anabaptist revolutionary politics on the other.)

As Natural Magic steadily lost ground in the eighteenth century to Mechanick and Newtonian science, it retreated underground into the alternate universe of heresy and rebel-

lion, that subterranean stream which has never ceased to flow beneath “our” world from the very moment Neolithic culture forced Paleolithic culture to disappear. To a certain extent Hermeticism became the scientific paradigm of this underworld, even as it failed to conquer or even influence the daylight world of power.

Robert Darnton, in his wonderful study of mesmerism,⁸ shows how Hermetic ideas, relegated to the shadowy realm of crank occultists, became wedded to an equally shadowy realm of social heretics, Masonic conspirators, pamphleteers, lumpen intellectuals, and utopian fantasists. One of the greatest, a traveling salesman from Lyons named Charles Fourier,⁹ experienced in 1799 his own vast vision of the animate universe, comparable to that of Blake in grandeur and complexity. Fourier proclaimed himself far greater than Newton, who had merely discovered the “attractive force” of gravity, whereas Fourier himself had determined that attraction—*erotic*

8 Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968).

9 See J. Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1986).

attraction—was the animating force of the entire universe. Like Ficino, Pico, Bruno, and Paracelsus (though perhaps entirely unaware of their works), Fourier enthroned Eros as the reality principle, and on this basis deduced the need for the eradication of civilization and the inevitability of utopia.

According to Fourier, not only the Earth but also the solar system and the entire universe are alive. (Thus Fourier's theory can be called far bolder than that of the Gaians, who think only Gaia lives.) Stars and planets, moreover, connect with each other and with the animate whole by means of "aromal rays," which are the vehicle of their "copulation." Earth, however, has a problem: it has been literally knocked from its course by the potent disease of civilization, which prevents us Terrans from realizing and expressing our own "passional attractions."

The cosmos is geared, so to speak, to provide an excess abundance of brilliance, luxury, amorousness, and beauty, whereas civilization offers only dull morality, scarcity, ugliness, and oppression. Labor itself, which to us is a curse, was meant to be "attractive," and in

the utopian condition of “Harmony” each of us would have at least thirty different vocations in order to fulfill our many appetites for activities which are enjoyable in themselves.

Once the conditions of Harmony were achieved, the cosmic illness of Earth would go into remission; so powerful the influence of our human social and sexual bliss that the other planets would feel the force of attraction and move closer to Terra. Thus realigned, our solar system would harmonize all its aro-mal rays. Earth’s ray (at present visible in its diseased state as the aurora borealis) would once again shoot forth to make love to the stars. Moreover the Terran ecology would undergo vast changes: the seas would turn to lemonade, and all creatures would live in harmony; in fact certain species such as lions and sharks would turn into their opposites—anti-lions and anti-sharks, now pacific and helpful. All this would happen, not on a Darwinian time scale of eons, but almost instantaneously once the Earth’s human inhabitants converted to Fourierism and arrayed themselves (voluntarily and spontaneously) into the sexualized “phalanxes” or “series” of Harmonian society.

This page can scarcely do justice to the grandeur, complexity, and nobility of Fourier's ideas, which inspired the creation of hundreds of Fourierist phalansteries in the mid-nineteenth century, and which seduced—at least for a time—such eminent Victorians as Horace Greeley, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Engels and Marx, and the founders of Brook Farm. Here we must concentrate on Fourier as a Hermeticist, for although he scorned all other systems than his own and in fact knew almost nothing of the “high” magical tradition, he was recognized as a true visionary by Illuminists, Martinists, Mesmerists, and Swedenborgians; his theory of analogies (or “correspondences”) unconsciously repeated that of Paracelsus and was picked up by Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Fourier had his socialist followers, who tended to downplay his obsessions with cosmic fate, “gastrosophy” (Harmonian metacuisine), or phalansterian orgiasticism, but he's also had his poetic admirers, including Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, and André Breton, who appreciated him precisely for his unique combination of Hermetic imagination and sensual delight.

Fourier attacked religion on two basic counts: (1) it inculcates morality and thus denies passional attraction; and (2) it denies “divine providence,” that is, the natural superabundant generosity of material reality, the luxuriousness of Harmonian nature that is our true birthright. The aliveness of the world implied for Fourier the unconditional value of the human body and its appetites and desires, which (in Harmony) would lead inexorably to social bliss.

In this, as he loved to boast, Fourier taught the exact opposite of all religion and philosophy, which are based on the superiority of soul or mind over body, on the idea of the imperfection of material reality, and on the condemnation of passional attraction as sin. Without naming it, Fourier thus put his finger on the “Gnostic trace” in all religions—mind/body dualism and the denigration of corporeal becoming in favor of an eschatology that transcends the flesh.¹⁰

10 The monotheistic idea of “resurrection in the flesh” was meant as a metaphysical rectification of the dualist aspects of cosmology (and probably crystallized historically out of the Church’s battles with Gnostic dualism). But of course this idea blatantly contradicts the monotheistic idea of “heaven” (which Fourier

Monotheists can accept the idea that matter is dead because for them matter is sinful, and the wages of sin are death. Descartes was a pious Christian and was applauded by pious Christians for saving the transcendence of the soul, the supreme *cogito*, from both the materialists (for whom mind is but an epiphenomenon of matter) and from the Natural Magicians (for whom mind and body are aspects of each other). The idea that matter itself is alive indeed demands of us a view of the relation between self and world that is utterly opposed to all religion and philosophy (as Fourier and Nietzsche defined them) except Hermeticism.

For Natural Magic, body, mind, and world are inextricably interwoven. Thus the Hermeticist's attitude toward Nature is neither passive (since we are participants in the world) nor rapacious, dismissive, and destructive. Nature is not "fallen" and therefore cannot be considered a mere repository of resources to

derided for its imaginal poverty) as a purely spiritual state of being. For Fourier heaven is on earth, only possible in the body. It's true that he believed in reincarnation; he found it an appealing idea because *being in the body* was for him the only conceivable form of eternity or absoluteness.

be exploited or conquered. Human beings—bodily and cognitively—are both wards and guardians of Gaia, both caretakers and enjoyers, somewhat in the manner taught by Native American shamans. Fourier, like all the Hermeticists, was fascinated by reports of tribal people still living pre-Neolithic lives; the European mages recognized in such social structures a parallel to their own utopian systems. They intuited an analogy between the shamanism of these societies and their own Neo-Pagan spirituality. Even Nietzsche (who is in this sense a Neo-Pagan) replaced the dead God of monotheism with revived Greek and Oriental deities to symbolize his sense of the primacy of life over fleshless abstraction. (Nietzsche actually *did* develop a myth in which he could believe, and which he hoped would change society: the myth of the eternal return. Perhaps he would have had more success with a myth of the living Earth, since it implies such a powerful and Nietzschean “yea to life.”)

It may seem odd to link the socialist Fourier with the individualist Nietzsche in defense of the living Earth. But in truth Fourier’s “social being” would be a far more real-

ized (indeed superhuman) individual than any poor cripples of civilization, while Nietzsche's "supermen" would find true fellowship in a society of free spirits, in love, and in art. The dichotomy between the social and the individual has been exaggerated by nineteenth-century political ideologues. The truth is that both sides are true simultaneously. Or so the theory of the living Earth would seem to suggest: Each of us is a part of Nature, it is true, but our value as individuals is not thereby lessened in any way, since it would be equally true to say that Nature is a part of us, each of us individually. Nature's freedom from all abstract "categorical imperatives" does not reduce all biota to a faceless mass; on the contrary, it restores to each thing its own true unique face.

A Tactic of Reappearance

*I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him
or her who shall be complete,
The earth remains jagged and broken to him or
her who remains jagged and broken.*

*I swear there is no greatness or power that does
not emulate those of the earth,*

*There can be no theory of any account unless it
corroborate the theory of the earth,
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not,
is of account, unless it compare with the
amplitude of the earth,
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality,
rectitude of the earth.*

*Say on, sayers! Sing on, singers!
Delve! mould! pile the words of the earth!
Work on, age after age, nothing is to be lost,
It may have to wait long, but it will certainly come
in use,
When the materials are all prepared and ready,
the architects will appear.*

—Walt Whitman,
“A Song of the Rolling Earth”

In *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*¹¹ it was suggested that “disappearance”—meaning the driftlike avoidance of all categories—could be considered a tactic for radical liberatory action. Here, in counterbalance, it is suggested that there may also exist tactics of *reappearance*.

¹¹ See Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1985, 1991).

And in fact why should nothing ever come back again? On the contrary; everything recurs. Lovelock points out that space flight and the first photographs of the whole Earth taken from orbit supplied the occasion for the recurrence of the idea of Gaia. He says it was first proposed by the Scots geologist James Hutton in 1785 but was ignored by the Royal Society (perhaps because it smacked of Natural Magic).

The myth of the living Earth cannot die because, like all “true” myths, it relates to and arises directly from the body. It is in fact the myth of the body. Even earlier, in Babylonian and Chinese myth, Chaos (Tiamat, Hun-T’un) is the body of the Earth. These myths deserve to return, not only because they would provide imagery for the popularization of radical chaos science, Prigogine’s theories, or Ralph Abraham’s work on complex dynamical systems, but also because they represent a social stratum, rooted in the Paleolithic, which is primal, material, ludic, festal,¹² oriented to

12 For a discussion of the “festal spirit,” see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

the gift rather than the commodity.¹³ It is also gender-egalitarian, based on excess rather than scarcity, lacking any structure which could be called the “state,” polymorphously erotic, esthetic, and magical. In this sense we can speak of a tactic of reappearance rather than a mere sentimental evocation of some lost and probably spurious totality.

To some degree this project involves the revival (and rectification) of a magical propaganda proposed by the Hermetic utopianists. Most humans spend most waking hours in a kind of low-grade semihypnosis. In this state they are susceptible to suggestion, to manipulation through imagery. In this sense, as Couliano points out, modern mass psychologists and advertisers already practice a magical propaganda, but for purposes of control rather than liberation. But the image of the living Earth belongs to the mythology of awakening rather than of soporific dullness; it is (as Nietzsche might have said) a myth of “daybreak.” As a potent image of life it successfully bypasses the filter of linguistic abstraction and its map/territory ideology,

¹³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: W.W. Norton, 1990).

not to deepen hypnosis and the mechanisms of control, but to plant a seed of wakefulness.

Science (especially mechanistic classical science) and religion (especially supernaturalist authoritarian religion) are still fighting their tired old battles for control of the world—a cheap wrestling match which has long since ceased to interest any but the most deeply hypnotized marks. The world of this discourse is long overdue for a new synthesis, one which would make use of science without its world-destroying Promethianism and of religion without its world-denying Sisypism. The recent (but so far unconvincing) attempts to reconcile classical science with archaic or Oriental wisdom bear witness to a genuine desire. Slowly, slowly, something begins to emerge, or reemerge. The spiral of intellectual history brings it round again, but makes it new, rectifies it, adorns it with brand-new scientific “facts” and hypotheses, and perfumes it with a flavor of “New Theology.”

The partisans of the living Earth have a clear course of action laid out for them. The image has already taken root in both religious and scientific thought and provides a bridge

between two opposites. The obvious areas of attack (or rather seduction and penetration) include radical philosophy and the history of science; ecological activism; the emergence of "Green" or "Goddess" theology within the monotheistic religions; the entire "Gaian" movement; the growing nonauthoritarian/autonomist antipolitical movement; the indigenous people's movement; the micronationalist or bioregionalist movement; the embattled remnants of the various "sexual freedom" tendencies; repentant socialists newly converted to an ethic of freedom; repentant capitalists who suddenly see the advantages of socialism now that it is too late; aging hippies; young peace punks; Neo-Pagans, etc.

While none of these groups can assume a lone position of power, they are all capable of uniting at least on the tactical level under the symbolic banner of the living Earth. This image could be the crystal that precipitates a rain of resistance and reconstruction—resistance to the masters of "dead matter," reconstruction of Blake's green and merry land right here in Albion or Turtle Island or wherever we live our everyday lives.

And what reality would the banner stand for? It would consist of the interpenetration and mutual seduction of everyday life and wild(er)ness. Anarchists know that every flag—even the black flag of anarchy—needs to be burned once in a while, lest even the best idea, the idea of freedom, become a spook or a shibboleth. But in the moment of insurrection, which is like a moment of intoxication, it becomes permissible to “worship” a symbol, because one already stands in the presence of the reality it represents. Therefore, next to the black escutcheon of Chaos and Night, we might raise the green pennant of Eros and Earth, and venture forth, like surrealist knights, to do beautiful and absurd deeds of chivalry...

Chaos Never Died

The Earth is Alive

[Revisions (2014): Fourier probably knew more about Hermeticism than I realized.

I like the idea of Daniel Quinn (author of *Ishmael*) that humans should give up being “mentors” of Nature and just *get out of the way*.

The photograph of the “whole earth” has had the unfortunate side-effect of creating a concept of “Spaceship Earth,” which is far from useful for enhancing the experience of a *living* Earth.]

Spiritual Anarchism: Topics for Research

*Cowper came to me and said: 'O that
I were insane always. I will never rest.
Can you not make me truly insane? I
will never rest till I am so. O that in the
bosom of God I was hid. You retain health
and yet are as mad as any of us all—over
us all—mad as a refuge from unbelief—
from Bacon, Newton and Locke.'*

—William Blake (1819)

1.

Stone Age Conservative (tribal, roughly
egalitarian, proto-shamanic, hunter/gatherer/
gardener, gift economy, etc.)

Sumerian city states (4th Millennium):
the breakdown of original unstriated human
polity; the emergence of separation (see P.
Clastres).

Enkidu in Gilgamesh: domestication of the
“Wild Man”.

The Good Old Cause & Everlasting

Gospel—what Blake called Druidism—in fact has always been the guise of our Stone Age shamanism and “goddess” paganism vs. the 6000-year Illuminati con-job: state religion.

The emergence of money as the Sexuality of the Dead.

2.

Bronze Age: war and paganism, leading to Iron Age imperial paganism of Rome, the Great Beast of Revelation;

Against this the early Church appears as a dialectic of resistance, especially in its Essene or Nazarite/Ebionite form, Zealotry, Gnosticism, social reform (moneylenders out of Temple, Gospel of the Poor, etc.) and neoplatonic mysticism vs. the “Donation of Constantine”, appropriation of Christianity by Rome itself (just as Sumerian priest kings appropriated Neolithic spirituality as the “suppressed content” of the Temple cults).

Christianity, originally a radical-gnostic cult (“Kingdom of heaven within you”) now functions badly as state religion:—severe con-

tradictions, schizo-culture, etc.

3.

But all religion is rooted in basic contradiction: the old Stone Age spiritual content (the Clastrian mythos, so to speak) plastered over with Metal Age ideology of hegemonic separation. (See especially the *Enuma Elish* or “Babylonian Genesis” where war god Marduk slays Tiamat the Neolithic goddess.) Religion constantly attempts to overcome or rectify this contradiction. But the moneylenders always return to the Temple and rectification is once again shunted off into heresy, apostasy, magical shadows, ritual crime.

Heretical millennial sects talk of restoring the Golden Age; this dream derives from actual memories (stored in myth) of Stone Age rough-egalitarian hunting/gathering/gardening gift-economy and shaman-pagan society.

4.

Spirituality does not equal religion. Spirituality

is the imaginal creative (*esprit*) of the social; religion its inverse or negation, its “spectre” as Blake says:—the alienation of that creativity into powers of oppression. However, due to complex paradoxes of dialectics, the kernel of spirituality is often found encased in shells of religion—especially the mystics (e.g. Eckhardt and Spiritual Franciscans)—and the poison of religion often taints the heresies, especially if they gain real power.

5.

In religious times all talk and practice of non-authoritarianism will be expressed in religious terms—usually as heresy, schism, apostasy, magic, etc.—but sometimes as “reform within the Church” or marginal but permitted forms of excess (monastic communism for example).

Historians of anarchism who trace it from a few Greek Cynics direct to the Enlightenment, with nothing in between, fail to appreciate the realness of *mentalité*: every age must experience something of freedom (if only its dream) on pain of losing its hu-

manity. The history of anarchism as consciousness (rather than ideology) lies buried in an archaeology of spiritual resistance. We need to re-read the heretics. (See for example R. Vaneighem's work on the history of the Free Spirit.)

6.

The Problem of Gnostic Dualism. Extreme forms of spirituality often identify the social world with the natural world—and condemn them both. They reject the “god of creation” as evil and even revile the “soul” as principle of life. Only “spirit” satisfies such extremists. Their body-hatred becomes more exaggerated and severe even than that of the Church (which at least condemns suicide and promises the resurrection of the body).

The problem of dualism haunts anarchism, I think. Proudhon's hatred of God may have derived from his early reading of Gnostic Dualist literature (while he was typesetting it)—a kind of secular Catharism. Atheist materialism, à la Bakunin, can seem weirdly

immaterial sometimes, ridden by its own hobgoblins, categorical imperatives, blind science-worship, machine over human, strange asexuality.

Christian/dualist body-hatred occupies the secret heart of our “environmental crisis”;—even as post-Christians we cannot escape the Conquest of Nature motif, which colors nearly all 19th-20th century progressive thinking.

Possible help in overcoming such crypto-Dualism might come from a “pantheistic monist” approach to shamanic and pagan models—what T. McKenna called the Archaic Revival—not a return *to* the Stone Age but a return *of* the Stone Age.

7.

Because we’re all post-Enlightenment whether we like it or not, “Science” poses for us the problem of teleology (or teleonomics as Henri Bergson called it). We really believe in the Death of God. The spectral aspect of the Enlightenment—what Adorno called the cruel

instrumentality of Reason—flattens permissible consciousness into one big 2-D map. Any manifestation of meaning would threaten the monopoly of “brute accident”, random collision of particles, mechanistic/behaviorist models of consciousness—“Newton’s Night.”

Hence the contemporary plague of meaninglessness: we all feel its germs lurking behind some thin scrim of hygienic daylight. Collapse of ethics. No thought for seven generations. Stop forest fires by cutting down the forests. “There’s no such thing as Society”—Lady Margaret Baroness Thatcher.

8.

The Movement of the Social on the unconscious level constituted in itself a kind of (anti) religion. After all what proof exists for atheist materialism?—just as spooky as God, really—the absence of meaning.

The Communist Party as yet another Holy Roman Empire.

And the philosophical weakness of anarchism surely lies somewhere near the

fault line between meaninglessness and ethics. How can there exist a right way to live in an “absurd” universe? Existential commitment? Leap in the dark? But why not simply carve out one’s own share, or rather more? What bushspirits say Nay? (See Stirner/Nietzsche.)

Nietzsche of course went mad and signed his last letter “Dionysus and the Crucified One”—a god reborn, but only into speechless abyss. Possibly we need to consider the exigency of a “rough morality”—and perhaps even some sort of meaning—however inexpressible—or even “spiritual”.

9.

Now with the collapse of the Social and the triumph of Global Capital we shattered remnants could put on happy faces and say that globalism is just the new internationalism, the Final Stage of Capital, and that soon the means of production will finally fall ripely into the hands of an enlightened global proletariat. Or—we could gloomily admit that the Totality has engulfed us, that History is dead, that

alienation is universal, that the last Enclosures have been carried out, that the logic of technology and money combined ends with the elimination of the human, Virilio's time/space pollution, the Big Accident. Or—we could go on refusing to accept the dichotomy—go on demanding the impossible. But what is the impossible, if not a kind of spirituality?

If religion and ideology both have betrayed us perhaps we need a new paradigm. But every “new” worldview has ancestors. Post-modernism needn't mean simply sifting through the rubbish of history to construct more “revolutionary” commodities and attitudes. Let's say we want to try to imagine a non-authoritarian Green movement based on Proudhonian anarcho-federalism and Kropotkinite mutual aid—basic “plumb line anarchist” stuff—but rooted in some form of spirituality. Where could we look for inspiration? Do we have a “tradition”?

10.

A genealogy of resistance? a “golden chain

of transmission” passing on the Stone Age autonomist spirit from age to age?

Since we’ve mentioned medieval Europe let’s start there; unfortunately we’ll have to ignore the Classical era, the Orient, etc.,—Taoism for example, or Sufism and Shiite Extremism, radical Kabala (Sabbatai Sevi and Jacob Frank), Hinduism (esp. Tantra, or radical syncretists like Kabir, or the Bengali Terrorist Party)—also tribal shamanism and its history from Stone Age to present. Instead we’ll stick with Christianity, if only because most of us are brought up to consider it the Enemy par excellence.

Subjects for research:

*Joachim di Fiori and the Spiritual Franciscans;
Beghards & Beguines—Brethren of the Free Spirit;
The Adamites (literal return of Golden Age—went
naked “for a sign”);
Radical wing of Renaissance Hermeticism, esp.
Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake for heresy
1600, and the alchemist Paracelsus, who supported
the Peasants Revolt 1525 against Luther and the
princes;*

The Radical Reformation—neither Catholic nor Protestant. Anabaptists and “Bible Communism”;
The Spiritualists (Sebastian Franck, Schwenckfeld, Paracelsus) who preached an esoteric Invisible Church with no dogma, sacraments, ministers or authorities;
The Libertines;
The Family of Love;
The Rosicrucians, the idea of “radical tolerance,” influence of Sufi alchemy and Jewish Kabala;
German mystics—Eckhardt, Tauler, Susa—later Jacob Boehme and the Hermetic Pietists (Jane Leade & the London Philadelphians);
English Revolution (see Christopher Hill and J.P. Thompson)—Diggers, Ranters, Levellers, Seekers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Muggletonians (Blake’s mother was a Muggletonian), early Quakers, Antinomians; later the Blasphemers’ Chapels;
Leftwing Freemasonry: John Toland, the Druids and Freethinkers. Paine & Blake as “druids.” Masonic societies behind the French Revolution;
William Blake—sine qua non;
The left wing of German and English Romanticism;
Charles Fourier as Hermetic Socialist;
American Romantics—Thoreau, Emerson, S. Pearl

*Andrews, Spiritualism and Radical Reform, the
“Religion of Nature” (Native American influence);
Gustav Landauer, Gh. Scholem, W. Benjamin;
Surrealism (esp. the fascination with Hermeticism)—
also R. Callois and G. Bataille;
The return of shamanism (since at least the 18th
century);
Neo-paganism;
Universalist heresies;
Psychedelic cults, “entheogenic ceremonialism”; etc.*

11.

The Critique of Civilization needs a strong science of its own. Post-Enlightenment science with its “dead matter” crypto-metaphysics needs a Kuhnian revolution. Restitution of meaning. Re-enchantment of the landscape. Not just a Sorelian myth but a real myth. Surrealist Surrationalist Surregionalist subversion requires potent Earth-centered spirituality, a Gaia Hypothesis that’s more than hypothetical—a spiritual experience. Ecstasy as enstasy. (See Bakhtin)—festival consciousness as magic. In this context Hermeticism recommends it—

self because of its rectified neoplatonic view of matter as spirit—the doctrine of Earth as a living being. (Nicholas of Cusa, Pico, Ficino, Cambridge Neoplatonists, etc.) Hermeticism is not a religion but a science of spirit and imagination—empirical, experiential, and experimental. Historically it's closer to us than shamanism or the oriental ways, culturally familiar (tho also strange, always strange). It's compatible with Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu mysticism, maybe also with Taoism and Buddhism, certainly with Rosicrucianism and Masonry, and with most of the great heresies.

12.

I don't want to argue for "anarchist spirituality" or "spiritual anarchism" on principle. By their fruits shall ye know them. "Research" here means participation, a willingness to hallucinate and be swept away beyond the Censor of Enlightened Reason, perhaps even into the daemonic. Psychonauts in psychic bathyspheres.

--October 02

"Anarchist Religion"?

It's often said that we anarchists "believe humans are basically good" (as did the Chinese sage Mencius). Some of us, however, doubt the notion of inherent goodness and reject the power of other people over us precisely because we don't trust the bastards.

It seems unwise to generalize about anarchist "beliefs" since some of us are atheists or agnostics, while others might even be Catholics. Of course, a few anarchists love to indulge in the spurious disagreeable and pointless exercise of ex-communicating the differently-faithed amongst their comrades.

This tendency of anti-authoritarian groupuscules to denounce and exclude each other, however, has always struck me as rather crypto-authoritarian. I've always liked the idea of a "plumb-line" anarchism broad enough to cover *almost* all variants of dogma in a kind of acephalous but loosely "united front" (or "union of egoists" as Stirner put it). This umbrella ought to be wide enough to

cover “spiritual anarchists” as well as the most inflexible materialists.

Nietzsche famously founded his project on “nothing”—but ended up having hinted at a kind of moralityless, even godless religion (“Zarathustra,” “overcoming,” “eternal return,” etc.) In his last “Mad Letters” from Turin, he seems to elect himself (anti-) messiah of this faith under the signature “Dionysus the Crucified One.”

It turns out that even the axiom “nothing” requires an element of faith, and may lead toward some kind of spiritual or even mystical experience: the self-defined heretic is simply proposing a *different belief*. “The Death of God” is mysteriously followed by the rebirth of “the gods”—the pagan deities of polytheism. Thus, Nietzsche proposes the *re-paganization of monotheism* when he speaks as Christ-Dionysus—a project first launched in the Renaissance by such heretics and neo-pagans as Gemistho Plethon and Giordano Bruno—the latter burned at the stake by the Vatican in 1600.

This very task—the re-paganization of monotheism—was carried out brilliantly by the African slaves who created Santería, Voudoun, Candomblé, and many other religions in which Christian Saints are identified or syncretized with pagan deities. Chango “is” St. Barbara, for example; Oggun the war-god is Archangel Michael, and might be considered the Roman war god Mars, as well. (See M.A. de la Torre, *Santería*).

The saints are “masks” for the spirits of the oppressed—but they are not mere disguises. Many santeristas are *both* Catholic *and* Pagan at the same time—which naturally drives the Church crazy!

As my anthropologist friend Jim Wafer said in *The Taste of Blood*, these New World faiths are not exactly “opium of the people” (even in the oddly positive and slightly wistful way Marx used that phrase), but rather *areas of resistance* against malign power. In such religions Dionysus can indeed “be” Jesus—or Obbatala Ayagguná—in a deliberate delirium

of pantheism where nothing depends on mere belief because actual trance possession by “santos” (Orishas, Loas) allows *everyone* present to see, touch and even “be” the gods themselves.

(Wafer was once hit up for drinks in a bar in Recife by a stranger who turned out to “be” a minor rum-loving deity.) Moreover—another Nietzschean point—these cults value magic over morality—and believe in gods even for queers, thieves, witches, gamblers, etc.

Oscar Wilde was first to notice the profound likeness of anarchism and Taoism which structurally is an acephalous congeries of polytheist (pagan) sects, with a tendency toward heterodoxy and non-authoritarian social values.

Obviously some forms of Taoism—or any pagan system—have been quite complicit with the State; we might call them Orthodoxies, and in these sense forerunners of monotheism. But the pagan spirit always includes an anarchic element too—a Paleolithic resistance to the State/Church and its hierarchies. Paganism simply creates new cults, or takes old

ones underground, cults that are and must be heretical to the ruling Consensus. (Thus, old European paganism “survived” as medieval witchcraft, and so on.)

In classical Rome, the oriental Hellenistic mystery cults, magical syncretisms of Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian and even Indian pantheons and rituals, threatened the traditional and Imperial order. One of these cults, a Jewish heresy, actually succeeded in “overthrowing” Classical paganism.

I suspect that a similar dialectic can be seen at work in 21st century USA with its “Imperium” complex, its 60 per cent church-going citizenry, its electronic “bread and circuses,” its money-based consciousness, etc.

A mass of oriental and New Age “mystery cults” continues to proliferate and morph into new forms, providing (as a whole) a kind of popular heterodoxy or pagan-like congeries of sects, some of them inherently dangerous to central authority and capitalist technopathocracy. Indeed, various sorts of spiritual anarchism could be mentioned here

as part of the spectrum.

I'm proposing that fascist and fundamentalist cults are not to be confused with the non-authoritarian spiritual tendencies represented by authentic neo-shamanism, psychedelic or "entheogenic" spirituality, the American "religion of Nature" according to anarchists like Thoreau, sharing many concerns and mythemes with Green Anarchy and Primitivism, tribalism, ecological resistance, Native American attitudes toward Nature... even with Rainbow and Burning Man festivalism.

Here in the Catskills, we've had everything from Krishnamurti to the Dalai Lama, Hasidism to Communism, Buddhism, postindustrial agriculture and Slow Food, hippy communes of the 'Sixties—Tim Leary—swami upon pandit, Wiccan upon druid—sufis and yogis—a landscape ripe for syncretism and spiritual universalism, ready to become a "burnt-over district" of mystic *enthousiasmos* for green revolution, if only some spark would set off a torch—or so one might dream.

In the context of the *belief* I'm envision-

ing I would situate Walter Benjamin's notion of the *Profane Illumination*. How, he asks, can spiritual experience be guaranteed outside the context of "religion" or even of "belief?"

Part marxist, part anarchist, part Kabbalist, he carried on the old German Romantic quest for a re-paganization of monotheism "by any means necessary," including heresy, magic, poetry, hashish... Religion has stolen and suppressed the "efficacious sacrament" from the elder shamans, wizards and wisewomen—and the Revolution must restore it.

Recently, the idea of an historical Romantic and even Occultist Left has gained wide acceptance and no longer needs to be defended. Bruno's statue in the "Flowery Field" where he died remains an icon for freethinkers and rebels of Rome, who keep it decked in red flowers. The alchemist Paracelsus sided with the Peasants in their uprising against the Lutheran nobility.

An Emersonian reading of German Romanticism (especially Novalis) might interpret its "first thoughts; best thoughts" as seed and

fruit of Revolution. William Blake is a radical heretical institution unto himself. Leftwing French Romanticism (and Occultism) give birth to a Charles Fourier, a Nerval, a Rimbaud. This deep tradition of “Romantic Revolution” should be added to the consideration of any possible anarchist spirituality.

The mystics claim that “belief” is delusion; only experience grants certainty, whereupon mere faith is no longer required. They may even come to defend mystical or spiritual (self) liberation against the oppression of *organized religion*. Blake urges everybody to get a system of their own and not to be a slave to someone else’s—especially not “The Church’s.” And, G. de Nerval, who had a pet lobster named Thibault which he took for walks in the Palais Royal gardens in Paris on the end of a blue silk ribbon, on being accused of lacking any religion, said, “What? Me, no religion? Why, I have at least seventeen of them!”

In conclusion: any liberatory belief system, even the most libertarian (or libertine), can be flipped 180 degrees into a rigid dog-

ma—even anarchism (as witness the case of the late Murray Bookchin). Conversely, even within the most religious of religions the natural human desire for freedom can carve out secret spaces of resistance (as witness the Brethren of the Free Spirit, or certain dervish sects).

Definitions seem less important in this process than the cultivation of what Keats called “negative capability,” which here might be glossed as the ability to ride the wave of liberation no matter what outward form it might happen to take.

Back in the 1950s, it might have been “Beat Zen” (which sadly seems to have disappeared); today it might be neo-paganism or Green Hermeticism. Just as anarchism today needs to overcome and shed its historical worship of “Progress,” so, too, I think it might benefit by loosening up on its 19th century atheism and re-considering the possibility (oxymoronic as it might be) of an “anarchist religion.”

[Note: *In memoriam* Franklin Rosemont
I should add that the kind of Hermeto-anarchism proposed here characterizes the late

Breton, and later Surrealism in general. I'd also like to invoke the Arab poet Adonis' great book on *Sufism & Surrealism*. And, recommend the Harvard edition of W. Benjamin's *On Hashish*. Sometimes it gets down to that old deliberate derangement of the senses... Sometimes the opium of the people is... opium.]

St. Nicholas Day '09

Quantum, Chaos, & the Oneness of Being: Meditations on the Kitâb al-Alef

*Star-watcher, be my intimate Companion;
Spy on the lightning, my night-time friend.*

Ibn 'Arabi,
Tarjumân al Ashwâq XVI

*Leave what thou art thinking.
There is no difference between the beings of Him
and thee.*

Kitâb al-Alef, 12

Some ten years ago in a review of Frithjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, I noted his tendency to make comparison between the "frontier" sciences and the far Eastern as opposed to Western or Middle Eastern traditions—a tendency which has continued in such later works as Gary Sukof's *Dancing Wu Li Masters*. What might be called the "cosmic" aspect of the Far Eastern traditions, their emphasis on ontology rather than theology, make them obviously immediately more attractive to "post-

Christian” thinkers than the Abrahamic traditions—moreover, Western science and Western religion are most often seen as enemies rather than allies, while the Far Eastern paths have remained *hors de combat*, relatively untouched by the raging battle between materialism and supernaturalism so typical of the West.

Nevertheless, in my review, I suggested certain Western spiritual figures worth re-evaluating in the light of modern science, most notably the Great Sheikh Ibn ‘Arabi and his school. I felt this project would prove worthwhile, not only for the sake of its inherent interest, but also as a defense of the subtlety of the West. An investigation of alchemy, for example, might well prove similarly fruitful, or so my instincts suggest. Unfortunately, I concluded (at that time), that both these projects would demand areas of expertise far beyond my scope: not only an insider’s knowledge of physics and math, but also a vast acquaintance with sufi literature or alchemical literature—neither of which I possessed then or possess now. However, I have grown tired of waiting for someone else to stumble upon this notion, or some fool foolish enough to undertake a comparative study of

Ibn 'Arabi and frontier physics. Perhaps I must rush in on this vast subject, knowing how soon my ignorance will betray me, in the hope that some angel will eventually follow—if only to chastise me for my errors.

In making certain tentative comparisons, I intend to avoid the pathetic banality of claiming that ancient revelations somehow “predicted” modern science, that the *Qur'ân*, for example, can be decoded as a treatise on subatomic particles, or the *Vedas* as a foreshadowing of general relativity, or that Atlantis and Mu destroyed themselves with atom bombs. Similarly distasteful is the suggestion that thanks to modern science we can now clear up and refine certain primitive crudities in the ancient revelations, as if the *Qur'ân* or the *Vedas* were no more than failed attempts, interesting but childish assaults on the citadel of pure science which we moderns so smugly inhabit.

Thus, we assume the infallibility of neither ancients nor moderns—but we must and do assume that wisdom is a jewel of many facets, or a light composed of many veils of light and darkness, veils which can be torn aside one by one forever without exhausting

the subtlety of truth. If the material world indeed consists of “signs” for those of “discernment”, as the *Qu’rân* says, then the meditations of a scientist or a sufi might well end by reflecting each other; they might reverberate or resonate with each other in ways that enhance our experience of wisdom, even if our bewilderment (in the Prophet’s phrase) is only increased thereby.

The concept of *al-wahdat al-wujûd*, or the oneness of being, requires in the present context neither explanation nor defense. Moreover, we here may take as axiomatic the *universality* of this concept. Advaita Vedanta, Zen, Eckhart, the radical Protestant mystics, Taoism, renaissance neo-Platonism, Ibn ‘Arabi, the Ismailis... Over and over again the human intellect has discovered ways to express the idea of radical monism, the perception that reality is unified not only on a transcendent but also on an imminent level, that “all is one” in quite a literal sense. Cultural drift and historical influence cannot account for the ubiquity and timelessness of this realization. Those modern scientists who arrived at strikingly similar conclusions about reality discovered only later

the strange coincidence with ancient mystical teachings. We may hypothesize the probability that *al-wahdat al-wujūd* reflects something of the deep underlying nature of things, and that sufism and quantum mechanics really do sometimes talk about one and the same reality. On this assumption, we can compare the vocabularies of both systems in the hope of mutual illumination and consequently an enrichment of our own appreciation of both. I wish to avoid any dogmatism on the question of who might benefit most from this experiment—I do not claim that scientists must learn from sufis nor sufis from scientists. Very simply, I wish to learn from both, and especially from that resonance of comparison in which the most delicate and original harmonies might be discerned.

In science, at least since Einstein, a trend can be noted away from Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanism, toward a unification of reality. Space and time are seen as aspects of a single continuum, and in the search for a Unified Field Theory, Einstein and his followers worked on the assumption that even more radical unifications and identifications can be

made. Stephen Hawking, the current master of this school, believes that within the next 20 years a Grand Unified Theory (or “GUT”) will emerge to reconcile the so-called four basic forces in physics: gravity, electromagnetism and the strong and weak forces. The Big Bang theory and the existence of black holes and “naked singularities” point in Hawking’s view toward a single expression of the origin of matter and energy, a beginning of time and the universe (or multiverse). These ideas have suggested (to some people) some parallels with traditional concepts such as the infinite but bounded expanding/contracting universe of Hinduism. Yet, interestingly, Hawking himself has declared all comparisons between physics and Oriental wisdom to be sheer “rubbish”. In his view, a unified theory is not at all the same thing as an expression of the oneness of being. In effect, by maintaining the inevitability of a final and complete set of theorems to describe reality, Hawking may simply be attempting to extend mechanism and dualism to their logical conclusion—for the existence of a GUT, a Grand Unified Theory, implies the existence of a separate consciousness to apprehend and

grasp the Grand Unified Theory. An observer and an observed, a machine with two parts. If, as Thomas Kuhn believes, social and psychological perceptions underlie all scientific paradigms, then Hawking would appear still to be searching for that Judeo-Christian God who does not play dice with the universe (so dear to Einstein's imagination); even though Hawking claims to accept quantum mechanics and *its* "god", who (in John Wheeler's words) not only plays dice with the universe, but throws them where we can't find them. In short, Hawking's nostalgia for finality implies (to me) a theology underlying his cosmology, a yearning for a creator-god. Post-Einsteinian physics of this sort might better be compared with monotheism or even deism than with monism.

Personally, I find Hawking's belief in the end of physics a depressing notion. A universe stripped of mystery would quickly become a hell of boredom. Reality, according to the *hadith*, is veiled with seventy thousand (i.e. an infinity of) veils of light and dark. To penetrate them all would collapse the fabric of reality. As Ibn 'Arabi pointed out in his commentary on this *hadith* in the *Tarjumân*, God's Mercy

lies precisely in the ultimate impenetrability of reality's fabric, for being itself depends on the essential unknowableness of the Unity. "*The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao.*" In the dance of Shiva, in the changing multiplicity of the ten thousand things, there and only there does the Unity unveil itself.

Hawking is correct to feel that this kind of "Orential Wisdom" is inimicable to his hopes. But other branches of modern science than his might revel in the idea that reality's essential uncertainty or unprovability is equally important as the idea of its oneness. Heisenberg's famous Uncertainty Principle and Gödel's Proof of the unprovability of mathematics, do no violence to the idea of the oneness of being. In fact, they support such concepts of unity. However, they do in fact imply that any mathematical or physical description or "map" of the universe (reality) would have to be exactly as big as the reality it describes—whereupon the universe would double in size—whereupon you would need a new description based on that doubling—and so on in infinite regress—with no end to the unfolding of those infinities which drove

Georg Cantor mad, and drove Ibn 'Arabi to sanctity—the unending stripping away of veils of light and darkness.

The Quantum theorists happily inhabit a universe which is not only “stranger than we imagined, but stranger that we *can* imagine”, a rather Alice-like world in which Schrödinger’s Cat may be both simultaneously alive and dead, in which particles seem to communicate telepathically, or else—viewed in a certain light—suddenly become waves instead of particles. Quantum mechanics has reinserted human consciousness into a central position in its world view, a position from which modern science supposedly banished all such spooks long ago. According to the usual “orthodox” Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the observer participates and is inextricably involved in the universe observed. In a sense we create by the act of observation. This leads the Copenhagenists to declare, “There is no deep reality.” Objects, every day real things, “float on a world that is not real.” (Bohr and Heisenberg, respectively.) Other theorists, however interpret quantum differently. For Heitler, Bohm and others, “re-

ality is an undivided wholeness.” In this interpretation, “the observer appears as a necessary part of the whole structure and in his full capacity as a conscious being. The separation of the world into an ‘objective outside reality’ and ‘us’, the self-conscious onlookers can no longer be maintained. Object and subject have become inseparable from each other.” According to Bohm, “One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts... The inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality.” Bell’s Theorem, which proves or seems to prove that quantum reality is non-local, bolsters rather than deflates the very Ibn ‘Arabi-like contentions of Bohm and his theories of “implicate wholeness”. Something in Bell’s Theorem seems to be violating Einstein’s cosmic speed limit. Some superluminal aether or field, or faster-than-light particle, or even “telepathic” particle.

The crux of quantum mechanics is the question of the collapse of the wave function, the point at which probability “becomes” actuality. Everett and Wheeler offer the delightful notion that the wave function never col-

lapses, that all possible events occur, but in alternative parallel universes, a notion beloved of science fiction writers as well as mystics. To quote from a wonderful cranky little pamphlet called *The Subatomic World in the Qur'an* by Aisha Abdul Rahmân at-Tarjumâna:

As for some of the other worlds Ibn 'Arabi mentions them in the Meccan Revelations. He also gives a source in the hadith from one of the companions of the prophets, Abdullah Ibn 'Abbas. He stated that the Ka'aba is one of the houses, and that each of the seven earths has a creation like us and so there is an Ibn 'Abbas in each of them. Ibn al-'Arabi states that this is verified by the experience of the gnostics, and he describes some of the earths which he visited. His description of the earths which were created from the earth left over from the clay of Adam is truly extraordinary. First, He (that is, God) created the date palm from it (that is, from this clay), and then, 'there was some clay left after he created the date palm. It was the size of a sesame seed, and Allâh stretched out an earth from that bit of clay whose expanse was immense. Had the Throne and what it contains, the Footstool, the earth, what is un-

der the earth, all the Gardens and the Fire been put into this earth, all of it would have been like a ring cast into the desert.' This is an incredible field. The word for 'expanse' is also 'space'. This earth was originally a point and then it became a world, a field, utterly vast beyond imagination. He (that is, Ibn 'Arabi) says that 'in every breath Allâh creates worlds which glorify night and day.' Worlds are constantly being brought into existence. He describes some of those worlds which he visited. Among them are the land of red gold (where one of our years is 60 of theirs), the land of white silver, the land of white camphor, and the land of saffron.

The sheer fantasia of such theories as Copenhagen anti-realism or the multiple worlds hypothesis have caused a reaction called "neo-realism". (This term I lifted from a book called *Quantum Reality* by Nick Herbert, which I recommend very strongly.) Einstein, Planck, Schrödinger, Bohm, and de Broglie have all looked for ways to "save the phenomena", to discover and describe Quantum Reality *per se*, rather than take the disagreeable step of agree-

ing with Copenhagenian anti-realism. (“Atoms are not things”, as Heisenberg said; or “There is no quantum world”, as Bohr says.) Reconciling the neo-realist project with Quantum facts leads to some very peculiar positions, such as maintaining that the world is real but non-local, as in Bell’s Theorem.

Could it be that the quarrel between anti-realists and neo-realists arises from a *semantic* problem about the definition of “reality”? In my ignorance it looks to me as if both sides are maintaining that reality means *Classical* reality. Thus the Copenhagenists are forced to deny that ordinary objects exist—an absurdity—while the neo-realists are reduced to looking for loopholes in quantum mechanics, and seem so far to have been utterly frustrated. But if Quantum Reality and ordinary reality are *both* real, modalities of the same *one* reality, then the dichotomy vanishes like a delusion caused by bad grammar. The only problem then remaining is that of quantum measurement, which asks, in effect, how “quantum-stuff” *becomes* “ordinary objects.”

“*Consciousness creates reality.*” Von Neumann posits that only one kind of stuff exists,

quantumstuff, and that ordinary objects are “made” of it. At some point the wave function, the all-possible nature of quantumstuff, collapses into a single statistical probability, a quantum jump which somehow “creates the world”. Where does this occur? The only logical answer appears to implicate human consciousness as the setting of the wave function collapse. Ironical that Von Neumann, the wizard of cybernetics and strategic game theory, should have been forced to develop a math which suggests that human consciousness must be written into any complete explanation of Quantum Reality. This “all-quantum” explanation of Quantum Reality certainly strengthens the *wahdat al-wujûd* aspects of the “implicate wholeness” theory. Here we get a strong radical monism in which matter and consciousness cannot be distinguished except as modalities of a single reality.

If we combine the Everett Wheeler hypothesis (that wave function never collapses) with Von Neumann’s quantumstuff, Bohm’s implicate wholeness, and Bell’s non-locality, we could arrive at a kind of insane physics which (as we

shall discover) bears an eerie similarity to Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought. In effect, might one not say that the *wave function never collapses*—but that there still remains *only one reality*? That there has never been a “fall” from *one* into *two*? If Quantum Reality is non-local, if “phase interference” and Bell’s Proof mean that all quantum particles which connect retain hologrammatical and instantaneous connections with each other—and if all matter was originally (before the Big Bang) one dimensionless macroparticle/wave—then *all* particles are implicated in *all* waves, and vice versa. The universe is (as Capra says, quoting Hindu sources) a seamless net of jewels, every jewel reflected in every other. The wave function collapse in this case would constitute a mathematical description of a mode of individual consciousness and its awareness of the world, its inherent implicatedness in the totality and oneness of that world—in fact, its virtual *identity* with that world. The wave function collapse would then not actually describe a physical event at all. In effect it would never have happened. The universe is now what it was and ever shall be: one reality.

In the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*

(October 1901) appeared a translation by T. H. Weir, of a treatise attributed to Ibn 'Arabi, (almost certainly not by Ibn 'Arabi but by a later and somewhat extremist adherent of his school), which has variously been known as the *Risalat al-ahadiya*, the *Kitâb al-Ajwibah*, or the *Kitâb al-Alef* (a name which ought to endear it to Borges fans). It comprises a commentary on the *hadith* "Whoso knoweth himself knoweth his Lord." It begins thus:

Praise be to God before whose oneness there was not a before, unless the Before were He, and after whose singleness there is not an after, except the After be He. He is, and there is with Him no after nor before, nor above nor below, nor far nor near, nor union nor division, nor how nor where nor when, nor times nor moment nor age, nor being nor place. And He is now as He was. He is the One without oneness, and the Single without singleness. He is not composed of name and named, for His name is He and His named is He. So there is no name other than He, nor named. And so He is the Name and the Named. He is the First without firstness, and the Last without lastness. He is the Outward without outwardness, and

the Inward without inwardness. I mean that He is the very existence of the First and the very existence of the Last, and the very existence of the Inward. So that there is no first nor last, nor outward nor inward, except Him, without these becoming Him or His becoming them... He is not in a thing nor a thing in Him, whether entering in or proceeding forth. It is necessary that thou know Him after this fashion, not by knowledge ('ilm), nor by intellect, nor by understanding, nor by imagination, nor by sense, nor by the outward eye, nor by the inward eye, nor by perception. There does not see Him, save Himself; nor perceive Him, save Himself. By Himself He sees Himself and by Himself He knows Himself. None sees Him other than He, and none perceives Him other than He. His veil is [only a part of] His oneness; nothing veils other than He—no sent prophet, nor saint made perfect, nor angel brought nigh knows Him. His prophet is He, and His sending is He, and His word is He. He sent Himself with Himself to Himself. There was no mediator nor any means other than He. There is no difference between the Sender and the thing sent, and the person sent,

and the person to whom he is sent. The very existence of the prophetic message is His existence. There is no other, and there is no existence to other, than He, nor to its ceasing to be (fanâ), nor to its name, nor to its 'named.'

If the words “God” and “He” were replaced in this passage by the words “reality” and “it” (and the words “prophetic message” replaced with the words “quantum theorems” or something like that) one might be excused for mistaking these lines for a discussion of quantum mechanics. In a sense the *Kitâb al-Alef* deals only in the purist metaphysics and the purist psychology, beyond all concern with the cosmological realm of becoming. In another sense, however, it contains the principles of a cosmology which we can flesh out by reference to other writings of the Sheikh in which he deals with the specific questions about the nature of time, matter, energy, and the universe. (Many of these supportive quotations will be drawn from *The Subatomic World in the Qur’ân* which, in keeping with its crackpot style, neglects to give any references and lacks all footnotes or bibliography. My impression

is that Ms. Tarjumâna discovered most of this material in the *Meccan Revelations*.) In forming this mosaic of quotations, I hope that resonant patterns will arise on their own without much prodding from me. In my ineptitude, I must rely on intuitive taste to ferret out connections, suggestions, hints of convergence, faint echoes, and reverberations.

For example, keeping in mind what we can of implications of relativity theory for an understanding of time, as well as the paradox of simultaneity exhibited by Bell's Theorem, as well as rumours about tachyons (those particles which seem to move somehow at a slant to our temporal dimension) let us read on in the *Kitâb al-Alef*:

The Prophet points to the fact that thou art non-existent now as thou wast non-existent before the Creation. For now is past eternity and now is future eternity, and now is past time. And God (whose name be exalted) is the existence of past eternity and the existence of future eternity and the existence of past time, yet without past eternity or future eternity or past time ever existing.

In His oneness there is no difference between

what is recent and what is original. The recent is the result of His manifesting Himself and the original is the result of His remaining within Himself.

At-Tarjumâna comments:

Time is an imaginary matter. The Qur'ân and the gnostics frequently point out that the determination of time depends upon your frame of reference. As it says in the Qur'ân 32:5, 'He directs the affair from heaven to earth, then it goes up to Him in one day, whose measure is a thousand years of your reckoning.' ... Ibn 'Arabi describes the determination of time. 'When Allâh created the Starless Sphere and it revolved, the day was not determined in it and it did not manifest itself at all. It was like the water of a jug in the river before it is in the jug.' Then He (Allâh) placed the stars which we use to determine the time. 'Then the sphere revolves with that particular sign at which man looks. It withdraws from him while he stands still in that place until it once again returns to him. Then he knows that the sphere has revolved one rotation in respect to him—not in respect to the sphere. We call that rotation a day.' (Ibn 'Arabi) then goes through

all the units of time and ends by saying, 'All of that has no existence in itself. These are relationships and ascriptions. That which exists is the source of the sphere and the state, not the moment and time. They are determined in them, that is, the moments are determined in them. It is clear to you that time designates an imaginary matter in which these moments are assigned. The moment is an imaginary portion in an existent source.

In that case we might well ask, how do matter and consciousness come into being at all? In the *Kitâb al-Alef* we read:

As the Prophet (may God bless him and give him peace) said, "Oh my God, show me things as they are clearly", (or 'show me things as they really are') meaning by 'things' whatever is beside God (whose name be exalted), that is, 'Make me to know what is beside Thee in order that I may understand and know things, which they are—whether they are Thou or other than Thou, and whether they are of old, abiding, or recent and perishing.' Then God showed him (the Prophet) what was beside himself, without the existence of what is beside Himself. So he saw things as they are: I mean,

he saw things to be the essence of God (whose name be exalted), without how or where. And the name 'things' includes the soul (or as we might say, consciousness) and other than it of things. For the existence of the soul and the existence of other things are both equal in point of being 'things', that is, are nothing; for, in reality, the thing is God and God is named a thing. Then when thou knowest the things thou knowest the soul and when thou knowest the soul thou knowest the Lord.

A world in which matter and consciousness have never actually come into being, but which is completely real—or a world which is not real but where matter and consciousness somehow exist—both these models are, I think, compatible with quantum mechanics and also compatible with the system of *Kitâb al-Alef*. Assuming we observe the world from the point of view of becoming (or of an apparent collapse of the wave function, as quantum mechanics would express it) how can we then describe the coming-into-being of matter?—which are really two ways of asking the same question. Ibn ‘Arabi says “the non-existence of existence is existence.”

Allâh is called 'the one who exploded the heavens and the earth into existence'. The Qur'ân also says, 'Have not the unbelievers seen that the heavens and the earth were a mass stitched up, and then we unstitched them, and of water fashioned everything?'

Water: that is, all-possibility or formless chaos. Ms. At-Tarjumâna says,

In the picture which we have of creation first there was the 'Ama, the Great Mist or Cloud. There was no atmosphere above or below it. Then the light of His essence flowed over it and the Mist became 'dyed', that is, permeated with light, this pure source of energy. Then the forms of the angels who wander in love appeared in it (in the Mist). These angels are in constant movement, unceasing motion. This is the nature of their energy. The beginning of creation is characterized by intense movement. The physicists view it as high energy particles and Islam views it as angels moving frantically out of the love which they experience in the majesty of Divine Beauty. Ibn 'Arabi describes it in this way: "Allâh was in the Mist. There was no atmosphere above or below it. That was the first Divine manifestation. The light of the

essence flowed on it as He was manifest when He said, 'Allâh is the light of the heavens and the earth.' When that Mist was dyed with the light, the forms of the angels wandering in love appeared in it. These are above the worlds of natural bodies. Neither the Throne nor any creature precedes them. After He brought them into existence, He gave a tajallî—manifestation to them. Because of that tajallî, they became Unseen, Invisible. That Unseen is the spirit of those forms. He gave them the tajallî in His name, the Beautiful, so they wandered in love in the majesty of His beauty. They will never recover from it.

This primal dyad of “mist” or chaos, “desire” or Eros, makes a remarkable parallel with the Hesiodic cosmogony. Moreover, it brings us to the necessity of a glance at the subject of chaos in modern science.

A chaotic, or genuinely random system such as the weather or the collisions of particles in a thermonuclear plasma, is probabilistic in nature and therefore is believed to be approachable from the viewpoint of quantum mechanics. However, a separate branch of math has arisen to deal specifically with chaos.

It originated in part from E. Lorentz's proof of the chaotic and unpredictable nature of weather; many other strands were woven into the new science of chaos, including the work of René Thom in Catastrophe Theory, which uses differential equations (as I understand it) to describe in topological form the "shape" of certain events in which the probabilities converge in sudden changes or "catastrophes".

The resultant topographical constructs, some of them very elegant indeed, are called "attractors" because they appear to be real but non-physical patterns, which attract certain configurations. Chaos math begins with the assumption that even totally random systems might exhibit similar or "universal" properties. And indeed they do. Attractors can be derived from phenomena such as Brownian movement, in which dissipative structures in certain states exhibit paradoxical tendencies toward the emergence of new or "higher" forms of order. These attractors (Lorentz's, for example) feel even weirder than Thom's catastrophic diagrams, and so are called "strange attractors". In order to visualize what they might look like, picture the forms of Turkish or Persian mar-

bled paper, or the earth's weather seen from a satellite, or the patterns of cigarette smoke in a beam of sunlight. Remember, these are only two- or three-dimensional strange attractors. N dimensions are conceivable, however—in other words, infinite dimensions.

Chaos math might seem to violate or at least suggest important exceptions to the Second Law of Thermodynamics (which predicts that entropy, not order, will result from chaos). In fact, for those of us who have always felt depressed by the Heat Death of the Universe, chaos theory offers reason to be cautiously cosmically optimistic. Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigogine, in his book *Order Out of Chaos*, credits chaos with as much philosophical importance as quantum mechanics itself. He suggests for example that this theory might help solve the problem of evolution. Neo-Darwinism appears to have failed to answer the basic challenge put to it—not by Creationists, but by information theorists—that being, how to account for the emergence of a more complex system out of a less complex system? In other words, how did we get life from the famous primal soup? “Random

mutation", the usual evasive answer, merely begs the question. "Garbage in, garbage out," say the cyberneticists. Prigogine suggests that the spark of life be sought in the direction of the strange attractors, which might be called the formative-causation factor in the primal chaos soup; some might call it "garbage", others might call it "bouillabaisse". As the *Kitâb al-Alef* says,

*Then if one ask and say: In what light regard-
est thou all the hateful and loveable things?
For if thou seest, for instance, refuse or car-
rion, thou sayest it is God (whose name be
exalted),—Then the Answer is: God Forbid
that He should be any such thing! But our
discourse is with him who does not see the car-
rion to be carrion, nor the refuse as refuse. Nay,
our discourse is with him who has sight and is
not born blind.*

Prigogine has coined the phrase "evoca-
tive evolution" to describe his hypothesis, so
strongly reminiscent of Hesiod or the Rg
Veda, or Ibn 'Arabi. If his ideas survive the
tests of experiment and verification, they
might also be used to unravel further myster-
ies such as that of the morphogenetic field in

biology. The problem of formative causation in embryology or the question of how a lizard, for example, carries out the regeneration of a lost tail, are vexing enough to drive even some scientists to consider various entelechies, *élans vital*, and other polite synonyms for sheer hoodoo. Rupert Sheldrake, in his *New Science of Life*, suggests that a morphogenetic field, real but non-physical, may lie behind or beneath the veil of life itself—and he offers ten thousand dollars to anyone who can prove or disprove it experimentally! As I understand it, this field, the morphogenetic field, would consist of certain *n*-dimensional strange or chaotic attractors, a subset of all dissipative structures. In the vocabulary of Ibn ‘Arabi, we would appear to be dealing with the *archetypes*.

To quote from the *Kitâb al-Alef*,
Everything is perishing except His Face; that is, there is no existent but He, nor existence to other than He, so that it should require to perish and His Face remain; that is, there is nothing except His Face: ‘then, whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God.’

Elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabi translates this Qur’ânic passage as, “*Everything is perishing except its face.*”

For God's face and the face or archetypal essence of a thing are, after all, one and the same. Looked at from another point of view, however, the archetypes are not real, "have not tasted of reality." In opposition to the Platonic concept of Real Ideas and their unreal shadows, Ibn 'Arabi also suggests that the archetypes consist of mere potential, and come into being (so to speak) only in the act of giving rise to an individual thing. For example, in speaking of the basic tetrad, Hot-Cold-Wet-Dry (which we might playfully think of as "forces") he says, "*Realities grant that these matrices do not have any existence in their essence at all before the existence of complex forms from them.*" Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi describes the actual creation process as a *shining through*, as a shining of light through the mist or dust of chaos. Another description of the beginning refers to the *haba*, the dust or very fine particles. The *Qur'ân* says that everything is created from this dust (XXX/20). Ibn 'Arabi states, "*A reality separated from the universal reality and it was called 'dust'. Ali and numerous others also refer to it. Then He, (Allâh) gave a tajallî—manifestation of his light to the dust which is called the 'whole'.*" (Implicate wholeness

again?) *Then the forms in it accepted as much of the light as their propensity permitted.*”

Here again I must repeat: I am not saying that Ibn ‘Arabi predicted Quantum/chaos theory, nor that modern science has “finally explained” what Ibn ‘Arabi tried to express in his primitive way. The comparison of the two systems may afford us or award us some *poetic facts*. Moreover it may suggest ways in which knowledge itself can be viewed ahistorically and from the standpoint of unity, a process which demands metaphors, which demands “peak experiences” and their symbolic expressions, which demands, in short, the poetic or creative imagination. These comparisons should not (and probably cannot) lead to reductionist certainties. The good hermeneutical phenomenologist (in Corbin’s phrase) demands only the perpetual unveiling of bewilderment upon bewilderment.

Quantum mechanics and chaos theory undoubtedly lie at the roots of an emergent paradigm (in the Kuhnian sense), one which will tend to replace both the earlier paradigms of Classical physics and Relativity. Those who see in the principle of chaos not a fear-

ful void, but the unfolding of what Ibn ‘Arabi calls *continual creation*, will seek and demand of this new paradigm that it express itself not in violence and Armageddon, but in liberation and self-realization. As the chaos scientist Ralph Abraham says, “Chaos is health”. In this project, the old idea of “Two Cultures” must be discarded like worn out luggage. At a point where Quantum/chaos theory and sufism might meet and resonate, at the point where both become a *science of consciousness*, there may also exist the point where every scientific discovery is also a human unveiling—and vice versa. In this vision, everything, self and other, is *tajallî*, a word which has been translated as theophany, hierophany, manifestation, Divine self-manifestation, or simply and literally as *shining through*. As the *Kitâb al-Alef* says,

“And to this the Prophet (upon whom be peace) pointed when he said: ‘Reville not the world, for God—He is the world’, pointing to the fact that the existence of the world is God’s existence without partner or like or equal... And when the secret of an atom of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both external and internal, is clear, and thou dost not see in

this world or the next aught beside God, but the existence of these two Abodes, and their name and their named, all of them, are He, without doubt and without wavering. And thou dost not see God as having ever created anything, but thou seest 'everyday He is in a business,' in the way of revealing His existence or concealing it, without any quality, because He is the First and the Last and the Outward and the Inward."

This entire comparison of Quantum/chaos and *al-wahdat al al-wujūd* may consist of nothing but vain imaginings. And yet I would prefer to make the Pascalian wager that it *does* point to valid conclusions, however badly I may have misconstrued both the science and the sufism. For in order to deny this validity, I would have to split myself into one of two simple *personae*, either the scientist who scorns what cannot be proven, or at best becomes a tepid agnostic—or the humanist mystic who scoffs at mere “material reality”, and at worst becomes an ignoramus. Neither one of these flatland cultural stereotypes appeals; I do not want to be one of those *two who deny*, those whom the Sheikh addresses in his commen-

tary on the *Sûra* of the Merciful, in a passage which coincidentally sums up his entire cosmological ontology, and with which I will conclude:

Singularity belongs to the sea of before-time. Gatheredness belongs to the sea of after-time. The dual belongs to the Muhammadan interspace of man. 'He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a barrier which they do not overpass. Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny?' Do you deny the sea which He connected to Him, and annihilated to the source, or is it the sea which He separated and called phenomenal beings? Or is it the interspace on which the Merciful settled? Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny? He brings forth pearls from the sea of before-time, and coral from the sea of after-time. Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny? He has the spiritual ships which run, raised up in the pure sea of the essence from the realities of the names like landmarks. Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny? The celestial world asks Him for its highness and purity, and the terrestrial world asks Him for its lowness and

impurity. Every second, He is in some affair. Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny? All that is upon it perishes, even if its sources are non-existent. It is a Journey of one who draws near to the Near. Which of your Lord's blessings will you two deny? We will attend to you at leisure, you two."

Anarchy & Ecstasy

Nineteenth century rationalist/materialist/atheist anarchists were wont to assert that “Anarchy is not chaos.” In recent years, a revaluation of the word chaos has been undertaken by a number of anarchist writers (the undersigned included) in the light of both “mythohistory” and science. Both fields now view chaos as more than merely violent disorder or entropy.

Classical physics and mechanics, like classical political theory (including socialism and anarchism), were based on a masked ideology of work and the “clockwork” universe. A machine which went haywire or ran down was a *bad* machine. Chaos is bad in these classical paradigms. In the new paradigm, however, chaos can appear as *good*—synonymous with such affirmative-sounding concepts as Prigogine’s “creative evolution.”

Meanwhile, and simultaneously, mythohistory has uncovered the positive image of

chaos in certain cultural complexes which might be called pre-Classical (or even pre-Historical). Thus, the very new and the very old coincide to offer us what can now be seen as an anti-Classical or anti-mechanistic view of chaos. For an anarchist to use a word like chaos in a positive sense no longer implies a sort of Nechaevian nihilism. Case in point (as Rod Sterling used to say): John Moore's pamphlet *Anarchy & Ecstasy: Visions of Halcyon Days*.

Moore appears not to have read any of the american "chaos" school of anarchism (such as Discordian Zen, anarcho-Taoism, "Ontological Anarchy," etc.). Nor does he refer to any works in chaos science. He seems to have "made his own system" (as Blake advises) in relative isolation, utilizing an idiosyncratic mix of readings which in some ways mirrors the american synthesis (as in his absorption of Situationist "pleasure-politics") but in other ways diverges from it.

Image of Paradise

Moore's brilliant analysis of the figure of

Chaos in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, gives his work a distinctive british flavor, as does his evocation of Avalon (the apple garden) as an image of paradise worth regaining. But Moore certainly does read american books—including F. Perlman, K. Rexroth, Margot Adler and Starhawk. His reliance on the latter pair of authors reveals an interest in “neo-paganism” which will no doubt annoy certain anarchists, despite his claim to oppose “religion” (and “God”) with “spirituality” (and “the Goddess”). I admit to some problems with this aspect of Moore's work, and will return to the question again.

Moore is at his best in the presentation of what I call “poetic facts.” For example, he investigates the etymology of the words *wild* and *wilderness*, connecting them with *will* (to be wild is to be self-willed) and *bewilderment* (to wander in a trackless forest; also “amazement”). From all this he creates a portmanteau-word, *bewilderness*, which he offers as a description or slogan of his project, his “brand” of anarchy. This is a ploy worthy of a poet.

In games like this Moore achieves his best writing and clearest thinking. When he relies on solid facts (such as dictionaries contain) and his own imagination, he makes real *donations* to anarchist literature (in fact I intend to appropriate the term *bewilderness* for my own purposes immediately).

An Order of NewAge

In dealing directly with a text such as Milton or the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Moore shines. However, when he relies on secondary material (the theories of other theorists) his insights become less convincing, less luminous. The extensive quotations from Starhawk are permeated with an odor of NewAge, and the semantic vagueness of the whole feel-good school of neo-shamanism. Moore also makes excessive use of an author named Henry Bailey Stevens (*The Recovery of Culture*, 1949), whom I have not read, but whose theories appear to me questionable, to put it mildly.

Forgetting his implication that the earliest human society must have been (like Chaos

itself) without “gender,” Moore uses Starhawk to assert the primordality of matriarchy. My own position on this vexing question is polemical: I oppose the idea of primordial matriarchy because I oppose the idea of any primordial “-archy.” The “Rule of Mom” may in some ways be preferable to the “Rule of Dad” (or then again it might not)—still, I prefer to vote for Nobody (an-archy, “No Rule”) rather than for the lesser of two evils.

As for H.B. Stevens, he supposes that the original society was not only matriarchal but exclusively *agricultural*, or rather (to be precise) fruitarian-vegetarian, based on an economy of orchards and groves. Admittedly this is not labor-intensive agriculture aimed at the production of surplus—rather an agriculture “before the fact,” before the “Agricultural Revolution” of the Neolithic. The Fall from Stevens’ paradise was precipitated by the Ice Age and its naturally-imposed scarcity, which led to the evil innovations of hunting and then animal husbandry.

The meat-eaters (referred to as “barbar-

ians”) then overcame the fruitarian Southerners, thus introducing oppression into human society. In the Stevenian ethos, Cain the agriculturalist was quite right to murder Abel, the herdsman, in defense of genuine paradisaical economy and freedom from “private property.” This reversal of biblical values suggests the influence of Gnostic Dualism, and indeed Stevens creates a dichotomy in which “good” represents tree/fruit/gathering/female/South and “evil” becomes ice/blood/hunting/male/North.

A fascinating thesis—but unfortunately for its supporters no “arboricultural” tribes have survived to be studied by anthropologists, nor can any trace of such economies be uncovered by ethnohistorical means. Structurally speaking, the “earliest” societies we can observe are hunter/gatherer societies which practise no agriculture, not even the cultivation of orchards.

Moreover, the concept of *non-authoritarian* societies (as developed by Sahlins, Clastres, and others) depends for its illustrative material on hunter/gatherer economies. “War,” ac-

according to this school, does not develop out of hunting but out of agricultural economy with its dialectic of scarcity and surplus.

Hunter/gatherers possess non-hierarchical organization and are frequently more gender-egalitarian than agricultural societies. Etc., etc. A great deal of writing on these subjects has appeared since 1949. None of it should prevent Moore from admiring the poetic vividness of Stevens' theory—but some of it might lead him to doubt the factual basis of Stevens' claims.

There may exist medical or political reasons for fruitarianism—or veganism—but Moore appears to imply the existence of moral reasons, a stance strangely out of harmony with his promise to adopt an “antinomian” position. If he were to argue that such-&-such behavior is “natural” (rather than “*moral*”)—and therefore somehow a categorical imperative of sorts—might I not then reply (as many have done) that it is “natural” to obey authority, or at least to accept on *authority* that the behavior in question is “natural”?

I see no way out of this dilemma—and thus I cannot help feeling that the inhabitant of the Bewilderness would do well to avoid all concepts of “natural” rights and wrongs (including the “naturalness” of hunter/gatherer societies and even of anarchy itself). The chaote is free to *imagine*—to imagine Nature as Desire or Desire as Nature.

If the chaote desires such-&-such a behavior, then let it be proclaimed by the Sovereign Imagination that the behavior is “natural” for that chaote—not as an inalienable right, but as an act of will. And if anyone should ask what then prevents the outbreak of violent disorder and the spread of entropy, we may refer them to Moore’s own analysis of chaos as a positive force of liberation, situated beyond the false and oppressive dichotomy of cosmic good and evil.

Moore makes fun (and rightly, I believe) of the usual pallid anarchist version of a future, free society, in which everything human seems to have disappeared except the politics of consensus. In its stead he offers a *vision*,

centered on a *mystery* of wildness, wilderness, and chaos, based on a personal reading of myth and history but also involving practical and experiential inspirations for action in the here-and-now.

As such, as vision, I find *Anarchy & Ecstasy* an “attractive” work (in the sense C. Fourier used the word, to mean lovable and sexy). There are pages, however, where Moore seems to take his vision for *revelation*, something beyond the personal, something absolute—and here I begin to tune out.

But as pure rant, the book overcomes its own limitations—and for its “delirious rhetoric” it deserves a proud place on the shelf labeled “Chaos.”

Review of *Anarchy and Ecstasy:
Visions of Halcyon Days*,
by John Moore. Aporia Press

Evil Eye

The Evil Eye—*mal occhio*—truly exists, & modern western culture has so deeply repressed all knowledge of it that its effects overwhelm us—& are mistaken for something else entirely. Thus it is free to operate unchecked, convulsing society in a paroxysm of Invidia. Invidious Envy—the active manifestation of passive resentment—projected outward thru the gaze (ie thru the whole language of gestures & physiognomy, to which most moderns are deaf, or rather which they are not aware of hearing).

It's especially when we're unconscious of such magic that it works best—moreover, it's known that the possessor of the Eye is nearly always unconscious—not a true black magician, but almost a victim—yes, but a victim who escapes malignity by passing it on, as if by reflex.

In more traditional worlds (worlds of the “symbolic order” as Benjamin puts it, as opposed to worlds of “history”), I've noticed

that people remain much more attuned to the languages of gesture; where there's no TV & "nothing ever happens," people watch people, people read people. Passersby in the street pick up your mood, & according to their temperament they clash with it or harmonize with it or manipulate it. I never knew this till I lived in Asia. Here in America, people react to you most often on the basis of the idea you project—thru clothes, position (job), spoken language. In the East one is more often surprised to find the interlocutor reacting to an inner state; perhaps one was not even aware of this state, or perhaps the effect seems like "telepathy." Most often, it is an effect of body language.

I've heard it said that the Mediterranean & Mideast worlds evolved a complex phenomenology of the *mal occhio* because they are more given to envy than we Northerners. But the Evil Eye is a universal concept, missing not in any space (such as the chill & rational North) but only in time—to be exact, in historical time, the time of cold

Reason. Reason's protection against magic is to disbelieve it, to believe it out of Reason's universe of discourse. Asia's defense against magic is more magic—in this case, the blue stone (common from Lebanon to India, maybe even farther East) or else, in the Mediterranean (our own "Asia"), the downpointed bull-sign of the fingers, or the phallic amulet.

But Reason & Magic are both superstitions ("left-over beliefs"). I suggest that the *mal occhio* "works;" but my analysis is neither rational nor irrational. Who can explain the complex web of signs, symbols, forces & influences that flow & weave between such enigmatic monads as ourselves? We can't explain how we communicate, much less what. If the "symbolic order" was replaced by "history," & if History itself is somehow now in the process of "disappearing," perhaps we may at last breathe free of the fogs of magic & the smogs of reason. Perhaps we can simply admit that "mysteries" such as the Eye—or even "telepathy"—somehow appear in our world, or seem to appear, which means simply

that they appear to appear, & thus that they appear.

The proper organ for this kind of knowledge would be the body.

Now Envy is universal. But some societies attempt to keep it under control, while in others it is unleashed by being turned into a social principle. We have no defense against the evil eye because our entire social ethic is rooted in Envy. At least the benighted Asians have their amulets & prophylactic gestures. It was not Reason which banned these frail defenses, however. It was Christianity. “*Verb. sap.*,” as English schoolboys used to say.

The two post-Xtian ideologies—Capitalism & Communism—are both fueled by Envy. In both systems it is a survival trait—no, it is an economic trait. “Oeconomy”—an old word for the totality of all social arrangements. The “Eighties” was not the decade of greed (which at least has the dignity of an active force) but of envy. The minorities envied the majority, the poor the rich, the “addicted” the healthy, women men, blacks whites...yes,

the rich envied the poor (for their idleness), the healthy envied the “addicted” (for their pleasures), men envied women (as always), whites envied blacks (for their living culture, & for their suffering), & so on.

A crude anthropology (note the “anthro”) claims that “primitive mind” experiences Envy as a female principle—(hence the phallic defense against the Evil Eye). A very limited view. “Envy” may be yin when compared with the yang of “greed,” but the Evil Eye, as a prolongation of Invidia, is pointy & penetrative, like a dagger—a death-dealing phallus—to which one opposes the phallus of life, the penis itself. An Italian savant once told me of the most horrendous example of the *mal occhio* he’d ever encountered, in a withered & hairy-faced old woman. A healer, a charismatic Catholic mystic, undertook the cure of this miserable witch—& discovered that, unknown to her, she was in fact a man (the genitals had never descended).

A gender-analysis of the Eye will get us nowhere. The association of the Eye with

women may arise from the tendency of women to be more sensitive to body language than men, & thus to hold on to certain “magics” even as they begin to vanish from those worlds which discover history (which, as everyone knows, is not, by-&-large, her story).

The Nuer believe that all accident, illness & death are caused by witchcraft. Most Nuer witches are unaware of themselves as witches. They suffer from envy. According to our trivial beliefs, all accidents are accidental—no one is to “blame.” We suffer from envy, but we are “innocent.” Frankly I can’t believe either the Nuer witch-finders or the pundits of our own mechanistic worldview. Both belief-systems are “disappearing” anyway—why should I buy passage on their sinking ships? Things are so much more complex than either worldview can imagine that, in effect, things are much more simple than either of them would have us believe.

I mean: the effects of two human beings on each other occur on so many levels that flat concepts like witchcraft or accident can’t

begin to do them justice. And yet, matters are not nearly as tangled & dark as the theory of witchcraft would have us believe, nor so brutal, so industrial, as the theory of the mechanistic universe. The body knows much without knowing, the imagination sees much that it does not need to understand. The body & the imagination overstand—they are above mere understanding & its clumsy abstractions.

Blue is the color of the sky & its happiness, air & light against the earth & shadow of Envy. But blue is also the color of death—as with the old Bedu woman who told Lawrence that his blue eyes reminded her of the sky seen thru the sockets of a bleached skull. The Yezidis, the “devil-worshippers” of Iraqi Kurdistan, refuse to wear blue beads or even clothes because it is the color of their Lord, Satan, the Peacock Angel, & to wear blue to ward him off would deeply offend him. So the blue bead is homeopathic—a bit of evil used to defend against evil—perhaps a fragment fallen from the Horned One himself, powerful in its goatly virility against the chthonic negative-

Yin-like power of Envy. And yet the stone is also the serenity of azure, turquoise, infinity, the Feminine—a bit of mosaic from the matrix of the sky, or of water.

Similarly the bull-sign, when seen upright & face on, is undoubtedly a yang-ish sort of symbol...

—but pointed down & seen in reverse—as it is presented to the view of the Evil-Eye-suspect (although the gesture is made surreptitiously), the sign becomes a Stone age woman-image, two legs & a vulva...

—so that potency against the Evil Eye comes from the “horns” which are stabbed down, the virile element—but within that symbol is embedded the power of the goddess as well.

Even the phallic amulet, which might at first appear all male, is not the penis of the animal-god, but of Priapus, a god of vegetation. It is the penis of fruit & flower—in some sense, a female penis.

The apotropaic complex is thus to be seen as neither male nor female nor even, properly speaking, androgynous. The symbols

revolve not around gender but engendering, around life or energy itself as a value opposed to the negativity, the vacuum, the deathly cold of envy.

The opposite of the gaze of love is not the gaze of hate, but that of envy, passive, unliving in itself, vampirically attracted to the life in others. A barren woman sees a pretty newborn baby—she praises it to the skies, but her words mean the opposite of what they say; unknown even to her, her gaze pierces direct to the infant's breath. Are we so certain that the language of gesture is weak, an evolutionary appendix soon to be bred out of the species?—do we not suspect that it is strong, powerful enough to attract love, or to make sick, even to kill?

Everywhere in our world this deadly gaze is directed at us, as in Bentham's Panopticon. We are described as victims, as patients, as passive focal points of misery—we are shown ourselves deprived of this or that commodity or "right" or quality which we most desire. The ones who tell us this—are

they not the rich, the powerful, the politicians, the corporations? What could we still possess to awaken in them such invidia, & the endless assaults of their *mal occhio*? Could it be that (unknown to us or to them) we are alive & they are dead? The TV screen can be an ultimate Evil Eye—because it is already dead, & the dead (as Homer showed us) are the most envious of all beings. Everything mediated is dead, even this writing—and the dead yearn for life. I’ve tried to protect this text against being an Evil Eye, as well as against the Evil Eye itself, by including in it the names of the appropriate charms. But prose alone will never do the trick. There must occur enchantment, a singing that changes (our perception of) reality. Or better, the blue breath of the serene sky, or the hot moment of the thrusting cock.

Envy is an abstraction because it wants to “take away from.” The Evil Eye is its weapon in the psychic/physical world. Against it, then, must stand not another abstraction (such as morality) but the solidest of fleshy realities, the over-abundant power of birth, of fucking, of

azure breezes. The amulet we fashion against
an entire society of the Evil Eye can be no
more & no less than our own life, adamantine
as stone & horn, soft as sky.

AGAINST METAPHOR

*An imitation of a Translation of Abu Nuwas by R.A.
Nicholson*

Come fill the cup w/ wine—& call it WINE.
Damn all metaphor—sin in broad daylight.
Every hour of sobriety is a disgrace of poverty—
wealth is to fall down every moment in delight.
Come speak the beloved's name w/out disguise
& curse all pleasures veiled in simile as lies

Sin & sin in multiplicity, sin in excess
for the Lord is above all Merciful
quick to forget his Wrath when the Last Days
press
& no doubt will forgive you in His Generosity
while all those moralists who abstained thru fear
of Hell
can gnaw their fingers w/ envy thru all Eternity.

[Note: Ibn Khallikan, who quotes this poem, comments: "It is a very fine and original thought." Ibn Khallikan's translator (de Slane) however adds in a note: "It is not, however, in strict accordance with Moslem morality"—quite an understatement!]

Secret of the Assassins

After the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the new Islamic community was ruled in succession by four of his close Companions, chosen by the people and called the Rightfully-guided Caliphs. The last of these was Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet's son-in-law.

Ali had his own ardent followers among the faithful, who came to be called Shi'a or "adherents." They believed that Ali should have succeeded Mohammad by right, and that after him his sons (the Prophet's grandsons) Hasan and Husayn should have ruled; and after them, their sons, and so on in quasi-monarchial succession.

In fact except for Ali none of them ever ruled all Islamdom. Instead they became a line of pretenders, and in effect heads of a branch of Islam called Shiism. In opposition to the orthodox (Sunni) Caliphs in Baghdad these descendants of the Prophet came to be known as the Imams.

To the Shiites an Imam is far more, far

higher in rank than a Caliph. Ali ruled by right because of his spiritual greatness, which the Prophet recognized by appointing him his successor (in fact Ali is also revered by the Sufis as “founder” and prototype of the Moslem saint). Shiites differ from orthodox or Sunni Moslems in believing that this spiritual pre-eminence was transferred to Ali’s descendants through Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter.

The sixth Shiite Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, had two sons. The elder, Ismail, was chosen as successor. But he died before his father. Jafar then declared his own younger son Musa the new successor instead.

But Ismail had already given birth to a son—Mohammad ibn Ismail—and proclaimed him the next Imam. Ismail’s followers split with Jafar over this question and followed Ismail’s son instead of Musa. Thus they came to be known as Ismailis.

Musa’s descendants ruled “orthodox” Shiism. A few generations later, the Twelfth Imam of this line vanished without trace from the material world. He still lives on the

spiritual plane, whence he will return at the end of this cycle of time. He is the "Hidden Imam," the Mahdi foretold by the Prophet. "Twelver" Shiism is the religion of Iran today.

The Ismaili Imams languished in concealment, heads of an underground movement which attracted the extreme mystics and revolutionaries of Shiism. Eventually they emerged as a powerful force at the head of an army, conquered Egypt and established the Fatimid dynasty, the so-called anti-Caliphate of Cairo.

The early Fatimids ruled in an enlightened manner, and Cairo became the most cultured and open city of Islam. They never succeeded in converting the rest of the Islamic world however; in fact, even most Egyptians failed to embrace Ismailism. The highly evolved mysticism of the sect was at once its special attraction and its major limitation.

In 1074 a brilliant young Persian convert arrived in Cairo to be inducted into the higher initiatic (and political) ranks of Ismailism. But Hasan-i Sabbah soon found himself embroiled in a struggle for power. The Caliph

Mustansir had appointed his eldest son Nizar as successor. But a younger son, al-Mustali, was intriguing to supplant him. When Mustansir died, Nizar—the rightful heir—was imprisoned and murdered.

Hasan-i Sabbah had intrigued for Nizar, and now was forced to flee Egypt. He eventually turned up in Persia again, head of a revolutionary Nizari movement. By some clever ruse he acquired command of the impregnable mountain fortress of Alamut (“Eagle’s Nest”) near Qasvin in Northwest Iran.

Hasan-i Sabbah’s daring vision, ruthless and romantic, has become a legend in the Islamic world. With his followers he set out to recreate in miniature the glories of Cairo in this barren multichrome forsaken rock landscape.

In order to protect Alamut and its tiny but intense civilization Hasan-i Sabbah relied on assassination. Any ruler or politician or religious leader who threatened the Nizaris went in danger of a fanatic’s dagger. In fact Hasan’s first major publicity coup was the murder of the Prime Minister of Persia,

perhaps the most powerful man of the era (and according to legend, a childhood friend of Sabbah's).

Once their fearful reputation was secure, the mere threat of being on the eso-terrorist hit list was enough to deter most people from acting against the hated heretics. One theologian was first threatened with a knife (left by his pillow as he slept), then bribed with gold. When his disciples asked him why he had ceased to fulminate against Alamut from his pulpit he answered that Ismaili arguments were both "pointed and weighty."

Since the great library of Alamut was eventually burned, little is known of Hasan-i Sabbah's actual teachings. Apparently he formed an initiatic hierarchy of seven circles based on that in Cairo, with assassins at the bottom and learned mystics at the top.

Ismaili mysticism is based on the concept of ta'wil, or "spiritual hermeneutics." Ta'wil actually means "to take something back to its source or deepest significance." The Shiites had always practiced this exegesis on the

Koran itself, reading certain verses as veiled or symbolic allusions to Ali and the Imams. The Ismailis extended ta'wil much more radically. The whole structure of Islam appeared to them a shell; to get at its kernel of meaning the shell must be penetrated by ta'wil, and in fact broken completely.

The structure of Islam, even more than most religions, is based on a dichotomy between exoteric and esoteric. On the one hand there is Divine Law (shariah), on the other hand the Spiritual Path (tariqah). Usually the Path is seen as the esoteric kernel and the Law as the exoteric shell. But to Ismailism the two together present a totality which in its turn becomes a symbol to be penetrated by ta'wil. Behind Law and Path is ultimate Reality (haqiqah), God Himself in theological terms—Absolute Being in metaphysical terms.

This Reality is not something outside human scope; in fact if it exists at all then it must manifest itself completely on the level of consciousness. Thus it must appear as a man, the Perfect Man—the Imam. Knowledge of

the Imam is direct perception of Reality itself. For Shiites the Family of Ali is the same as perfected consciousness.

Once the Imam is realized, the levels of Law and Path fall away naturally like split husks. Knowledge of inner meaning frees one from adherence to outer form: the ultimate victory of the esoteric over the exoteric.

The “abrogation of the Law” however was considered open heresy in Islam. For their own protection Shiites had always been allowed to practice taqqiya, “permissible dissimulation” or Concealment, and pretend to be orthodox to escape death or punishment. Ismailis could pretend to be Shiite or Sunni, whichever was most advantageous.

For the Nizaris, to practice Concealment was to practice the Law; in other words, pretending to be orthodox meant obeying the Islamic Law. Hasan-i Sabbah imposed Concealment on all but the highest ranks at Alamut, because in the absence of the Imam the veil of illusion must naturally conceal the esoteric truth of perfect freedom.

In fact, who was the Imam? As far as history was concerned, Nizar and his son died imprisoned and intestate. Hasan-i Sabbah was therefore a legitimist supporting a non-existent pretender! He never claimed to be the Imam himself, nor did his successor as “old Man of the Mountain,” nor did his successor. And yet they all preached “in the name of Nizar.” Presumably the answer to this mystery was revealed in the seventh circle of initiation.

Now the third Old Man of the Mountain had a son named Hasan, a youth who was learned, generous, eloquent and loveable. Moreover he was a mystic, an enthusiast for the deepest teachings of Ismailism and Sufism. Even during his father’s lifetime some Alamutis began to whisper that young Hasan was the true Imam; the father heard these rumors and denied them. I am not the Imam, he said, so how could my son be the Imam?

In 1162 the father died and Hasan (call him Hasan II to distinguish him from Hasan-i Sabbah) became ruler of Alamut. Two years

later, on the seventeenth of Ramazan (August 8) in 1164, he proclaimed the Qiyamat, or Great Resurrection. In the middle of the month of Fasting, Alamut broke its fast forever and proclaimed perpetual holiday.

The resurrection of the dead in their bodies at the “end of time” is one of the most difficult doctrines of Islam (and Christianity as well). Taken literally it is absurd. Taken symbolically however it encapsulates the experience of the mystic. He “dies before death” when he comes to realize the separative and alienated aspects of the self, the ego-as-programmed-illusion. He is “reborn” in consciousness but he is reborn in the body, as an individual, the “soul-at-peace.”

When Hasan II proclaimed the Great Resurrection which marks the end of Time, he lifted the veil of concealment and abrogated the religious Law. He offered communal as well as individual participation in the mystic’s great adventure, perfect freedom.

He acted on behalf of the Imam, and did not claim to be the Imam himself. (In fact he

took the title of Caliph or “representative.”) But if the family of Ali is the same as perfect consciousness, then perfect consciousness is the same as the family of Ali. The realized mystic “becomes” a descendent of Ali (like the Persian Salman whom Ali adopted by covering him with his cloak, and who is much revered by sufis, Shiites and Ismailis alike).

In Reality, in haqiqah, Hasan II was the Imam because in the Ismaili phrase, he had realized the “Imam-of-his-own-being.” The Qiyamat was thus an invitation to each of his followers to do the same, or at least to participate in the pleasures of paradise on earth.

The legend of the paradisal garden at Alamut where the houris, cupbearers, wine and hashish of paradise were enjoyed by the Assassin in the flesh, may stem from a folk memory of the Qiyamat. Or it may even be literally true. For the realized consciousness this world is no other than paradise, and its bliss and pleasures are all permitted. The Koran describes paradise as a garden. How logical then for wealthy Alamut to become outwardly the

reflection of the spiritual state of the Qiyamat.

In 1166 Hasan II was murdered after only four years of rule. His enemies were perhaps in league with conservative elements at Alamut who resented the Qiyamat, the dissolving of the old secret hierarchy (and thus their own power as hierarchs) and who feared to live thus openly as heretics. Hasan II's son however succeeded him and established the Qiyamat firmly as Nizari doctrine.

If the Qiyamat were accepted in its full implications however it would probably have brought about the dissolution and end of Nizari Ismailism as a separate sect. Hasan II as Qa'im or "Lord of the Resurrection" had released the Alamutis from all struggle and sense of legitimist urgency. Pure esotericism, after all, cannot be bound by any form.

Hasan II's son, therefore, compromised. Apparently he decided to "reveal" that his father was in fact and in blood a direct descendent of Nizar. The story runs that after Hasan-i Sabbah had established Alamut, a mysterious emissary delivered to him the infant grandson of Imam

Nizar. The child was raised secretly at Alamut. He grew up, had a son, died. The son had a son. This baby was born on the same day as the son of the Old Man of the Mountain, the outward ruler. The infants were surreptitiously exchanged in their cradles. Not even the Old Man knew of the ruse. Another version has the hidden Imam committing adultery with the Old Man's wife, and producing as love-child the infant Hasan II.

The Ismailis accepted these claims. Even after the fall of Alamut to the Mongol hordes the line survived and the present leader of the sect, the Aga Khan, is known as the 49th in descent from Ali (and pretender to the throne of Egypt!). The emphasis on Alid legitimacy has preserved the sect as a sect. Whether it is literally true or not, however, matters little to an understanding of the Qiyamat. With the proclamation of the Resurrection, the teachings of Ismailism were forever expanded beyond the borders imposed on them by an historical event. The Qiyamat remains as a state of consciousness which anyone can adhere to

or enter, a garden without walls, a sect without a church, a lost moment of Islamic history that refuses to be forgotten, standing outside time, a reproach or challenge to all legalism and moralism, to all the cruelty of the exoteric. An invitation to paradise.

Secular Antinomian Anabaptist Neo-Luddism

By banning the telephone from the home, Old Order Amish...try to maintain the primacy of communication within the context of community.

—D.Z. Umble

Church splits are bad, some things are worse, and one of them is to keep on compromising with something we know is sinful.

—Anon., *Separated Unto Christ*
(Old Order Mennonite tract,
circa 1995)

The Unabomber wanted to return to about 1880; at the other extreme, the Green Nihilists demand the deep Paleolithic via the total destruction of modern Civilization. The term *anarcho-primitivist* can cover a whole spectrum of variations on the theme of reversion, of “going back” to some “earlier” human condition.

But today’s anarcho-primitivists are not the only critics of modern technology and

alienation to emerge from the traditional left or “Movement of the Social.” Charles Fourier may have been the first radical to out-do Rousseau by attacking the totality of Civilization and praising “savages and Barbarians” as far happier than modern humanity. But he proposed moving forward to Utopia rather than back to Tahiti (always the French archetype of primitive paradise—hence, Gauguin’s later expatriation).

Of course, a classical anarchist critique of Civilization and specifically of technology can already be gleaned from William Morris and Kropotkin, with precursors among the Romantics. (See, for instance, Byron’s poem in defense of the machine-smashers, with its incendiary refrain: “No King but King Ludd!” Blake’s “satanic mills” were also part of the tradition.) One of the original *Ludd Letters* defined the Luddite movement as resistance to any technology “hurtful to the commonalty.”

By this definition, anarcho-primitivists might be defined as neo-luddites. Some draw the line at steam, others at flintknapping, but

the principle is the same. Not to make light of the differences—but if I have to wait for the overthrow of language, music, and even a sense of humor before the gates of paradise crack open even a tiny slit, then I confess despair.

The Nihilists among us appear to believe that no compromise, no gradual approach (e.g., through alternative technology) can be admitted. Destruction, yes. But no “building the kernel of the new society within the shell of the old.” All Now or Nothing Never. Therefore, they see no purpose in any piecemeal reversionism of a constructive nature. And consequently, it seems, they see no reason to “deny” themselves the use of cars and computers.

I find this puzzling because I find cars and computers to be extremely unpleasurable devices. I’d love to be able to live without them, and I’ve greatly enjoyed the few periods of my life when I could (mostly in what we used to call the Third World.) Unfortunately, luddism is not a viable practice at the individual hermit level (or anyway, not for a klutz like the author). You need *communitas* (as that “Neolithic

Conservative” Paul Goodman put it) in order to live luddism as a pleasure and not a form of self-denial like wearing a hair shirt.

It’s almost a Catch-22. You need luddism to make *communitas* and *communitas* to practice luddism.

Furthermore, most of us would starve to death without cars and computers and even cell phones. Capital creates needs; those needs become real. Most of us can live without a TV, but to live without telephones would require an organic local community organized voluntarily around luddite ideals.

Which brings us to the Anabaptists.

The original Anabaptists have been admired by many revolutionaries from Engels to Landauer. The “Luther Blisset” trio of Bologna Neo-Situationists who wrote the highly entertaining erudite pulp thriller *Q*, depict the old Anabaptists as out-and-out antinomian anarchists. (Here, they were possibly influenced by R. Vaneigem’s praise of the Brethren of the Free Spirit.) Relevant to the present discussion, however, is the Anabaptist critique of technol-

ogy, which only developed at a later period.

The revolutionary Anabaptists were ruthlessly suppressed by both 16th century Protestant and Catholic powers. But quietist/pacifist Anabaptism survived by fleeing to the New World. In Europe, almost no trace remains, but here in North America, we have the Old Order Amish, Mennonites, Brethren, Schwenkfeldians, and even a few Old Order Quakers, all still living in intentional communities and practicing luddism, functioning more or less happily without telephones, computers, cars, or even electricity.

But are they in any sense anarchists? They may be quite authoritarian/patriarchal on one level, but they also retain interesting traces of their anti-authoritarian heritage. For instance, their bishops and ministers are chosen by lot. They refuse all cooperation with governments, will not serve in armies, or run for office; and they practice mutual aid. The Hutterites live as "Bible communists;" the Amish live in separate households; but all are intensely social. The Bruderhof, an offshoot of

the Hutterites, are proud of their anarcho-socialist forebears and almost worship the German anarchist, Gustav Landauer, as a saint.

The only real source of power in the Old Order sects is the *Bann*, whereby members of the autonomous congregation can excommunicate and “shun”—but only by unanimous consent—any member who refuses to accept the (unwritten) Ordinances on technology. Uncountable splits have resulted from use of the *Bann*, with subsects who use hook-and-eye fasteners and not buttons or zippers, and other subsects who accept cars but only if painted entirely black including the bumpers. The variations are fascinating and *not trivial* (although sometimes amusing). Dissidents are free to leave. Around age 20 the youth are invited to join the church, which of course can only be joined by *adult* baptism; if they decide not to join, their decision is regretted but they are not shunned. Physical coercion in any case is forbidden by pacifist ideals.

The Old Orders emphasize farming because, in their view, Nature is close to God.

From the anarcho-primitive perspective, this farming involves a level of “domestication” unacceptable to extremists. But we should remember that they are actually practicing a form of *reversion*, and we are not. How do they do it?

Some “plain people” share a single phone or a single car among five or six adjacent farms. Instead of electricity, they’ll use compressed air and propane. Others allow some electricity if it’s generated off-grid. One might call this an impure or empirical luddism.

In every decision the ideal is to maintain communities. Horses allow organic community. The horse is the key to Old Order tech. As one bishop put it, “If you can pull it with horse, you can have it.” But the Internet, they feel, threatens community with utter destruction. The sects that maintain a hard line on tech make hard use of the *Bann*. Around 1907, the main Amish body in Lancaster, Pennsylvania lost a quarter of its members over the telephone question, using the *Bann* with strict revolutionary logic to preserve the core group. The Old Order Brethren divided over tele-

phones in 1905. They certainly remind one of anarchists or Surrealists or Situationists in their tendency to wrangle and split.

Could there exist such a thing as *secular anabaptism*—or is the fanaticism of religion a prerequisite for carrying on a revolution for 400 years without flinching? In any case, their persistence and existence prove that luddite life is possible, given some compromises, even in the (post)modern world.

In the 1990s, a brief secular luddite movement derived some inspiration and held a series of conferences in contact with some of the plain people. Kirkpatrick Sale published *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution: Lessons for the Computer Age*. But when I wrote to him two years ago he admitted that he knew of not one secular luddite community anywhere in the world.

Why can't anarchists live without electricity? Are we finally too implicated in the Progressism and technophilia of most of our historical movement? How many anarcho-primitivists does it take to unscrew a light bulb?

To put the question another way: why are we denying ourselves the *pleasure of reversion*?

The Amish may be dour, but they have produced a sort of zen-shaker life-texture that possesses spontaneous *good taste*—always a sign of pleasure. Some Old Order sects allow tobacco and wine and “bed bundling” among courting couples—and their various “bees” and “frolics” provide excuses for feasts and “visiting.” Their art has powerful roots in the creative mysticism of such Pennsylvania Rosicrucian ancestors as Johannes Kelpius or the visionaries of Ephrata. Romanticism and nature mysticism come naturally to them (and the Bruderhof read Novalis and Goethe).

But the key to Amish autonomy is economic self-sufficiency. They buy no insurance and accept no government hand-outs. Farming and crafts provide what they need. In Italy, anarchism almost provides an alternate economy in the wide network of squats, social centers, and farms it controls. But in the USA now, anarchism has no economic institutions capable of providing livelihoods for its

adherents. No food or craft coops, no farms or Community Supported Agriculture.

The very use of technopathocracy's hi-tech mechanisms such as cars and computers seems to militate against the feasibility of realizing other desires, as if the *apparatus* itself were designed to suppress them. (Which it is.)

The Amish model involves a retreat from "the World" rather than the revolutionary confrontation proposed by militant 16th century Anabaptism—or by anarchism. But nowadays retreat makes good sense from a tactical point of view in light of the Empire's overwhelming force for oppression on every level of "civilized" life. In fact, this retreat has already occurred. (American anarchism is not presently engaged in revolution, despite its occasional rhetoric and perennial optimism.) But why shouldn't we make it a *tactical retreat*?

Can we imagine an antinomian Anabaptism or even a secular neo-luddism capable of organizing a tentative and impure but still radical *reversion* on the microscale of intentional community? A small but pleasur-

able (also risky) retreat from world of Too Late Capitalism?

The Old Orders don't seem to theorize. Their Ordinances are fluid because unwritten. Writing is distrusted because it stops the flow and threatens the organicity of tradition. In fact, all their theory work tends to be done in community, not by individual leaders, and certainly not by reading texts (other than scripture of course, which itself possesses a certain fluidity in exegesis). In a sort of Hegelian way, theory is both *suppressed* in its alienating mode as "dead letter" and *realized* at once in its creative mode as living community.

Precisely this "overcoming" marks the genetic link between Anabaptism and revolutionary anarchism and communism—a shared ancestry which fascinated historians like Norman Cohn and E.P. Thompson. Anabaptists and related sects like the Old Order Quakers have apparently failed—but only because they turned away from the World as "saving remnant" or "gathered churches," closed themselves off from oppression and alienation rather than

confronting it with the militancy of the early Anabaptists like Thomas Munzer. (The early Quakers also had their ranters and militants like James Nayler. Later, they escaped the extermination of the radical sects in England by embracing pacifism and buying Pennsylvania.)

Does anarcho-primitivism have anything to learn from these sects? For us, it may seem that revolution is necessary strategically but impossible tactically—precisely the situation facing 16th century Anabaptism and the anti-authoritarian antinomian extreme “left” of the Reformation. The response was to drop out and retreat as far from the “Anti-christ” as possible into small utopian communities. “Revolution” was turned inward, via the *Bann* and the splits, rather than outward into missionary work or confrontational militancy. And, since some of these communities have lasted for centuries, resisted compulsory education, conscription, and even electricity, an empirical argument can be made for the efficacy of those tactics.

Anarchist utopianism has a noble history in America. It has always been part of our strategic deployment. If the Old Order sects have no other lesson for us, at least they demonstrate that the vortex of the apparatus can be resisted by living without it, i.e., outside it—to the extent *really* possible.

The last time something like anarcho-communitarianism was tried on a wider scale, in the 1960s, it ended in “failure.” But in a world where Capital can recuperate *almost* everything, perhaps failure is our last possible Outside. In any case, it was an adventure. Success or failure remain unforeseeable—but adventure is something that can be willed.

Interview with *Into-Gal*

Into-Gal: In The Western Lands William Burroughs acknowledged your research on Hassan i Sabbah, and we were wondering whether you'd actually been to the fortress of Alamut in what's now Iran?

PLW: I kept putting it off and putting it off and then I'd left Iran before I'd ever got around to it. At the time I was there it was a pretty rough trip—I knew people who did it, you had to have a four-wheel drive or rent donkeys for the last bit of it. So it was always like I had to organize it, I had to get someone to go with me, and it just never worked out. People who went there had an interesting time. They saw the ruins that are there to be seen, and they met people who are there to be met who have a few legends and are nice peasants, the way peasants usually are nice. But nothing, no great revelations about the history or the meaning of Ismailism have ever come out of any of these journeys, because nobody around there—I mean there are no Ismailis anymore

in that valley and in that region in general, so there's really no folklore apparently, no deep folklore anyway. I mean there are legends that they tell. Probably the best one is by Freya Stark, who wrote a travel book about her visit there and she did her homework, knew what she was looking at, and it's a well-written and enjoyable book. It's called *Valleys of the Assassins*.

When were you in Iran?

I was there for most of the '70s.

You knew of Hassan i Sabbah at that point?

Yes, it was one of the things I was interested in because of reading that I'd done in New York. It wasn't just for that—actually one of the reasons why I went to Iran was I wanted to meet Vladimir Ivanov who was the great Russian scholar of Ismaili studies, who at that time had moved from Bombay where he'd done most of his work, to Tehran. When I got there he'd been dead for six months, and I hadn't heard about his death, so I missed him.

But in Bombay I spent some time researching the Ismailis, because they have a big presence there. That's where the Aga Khan's lived for so long, and they had a library, so I did some serious research there.

What were the circumstances under which you were staying there? You were there during the uprisings, the Iranian Revolution...

That put an end to my living in the East.

Did you expect it?

Well, you know everybody likes to think they knew what was coming and everything, but we didn't. It was one of those situations where there would be trouble and the trouble would die down, and you'd think oh well that's that then. And in fact when it really came for real it caught everybody by surprise, even though it had been expected. Everyone knew that the Shah's regime was pretty rotten, but no one knew how delicately balanced it was against the pressures of history. So that, for example, the fact that the Shah really gave up without

a fight, that was the other shoe that never dropped. Everyone was saying wow, it's going to be awful, because he had modern weaponry but it turned out that that modern weaponry purchased from America was pretty irrelevant. You can't use jet planes against half a million chanting people, chanting in the streets of downtown Tehran. I guess in a sense he realized that, but it also turned out that he'd been sick and he just didn't have the willpower to fight anymore, and by that time both the military and the government were pretty corrupt, and just kind of collapsed without his iron will to direct them. So I left at a certain point when things were pretty violent—there would be shooting in the streets every night, and you'd hear guns going off and people yelling all over the place, and every so often some mob would rush by the door, or you'd come out to have supper and notice that all the banks were on fire. And finally I said, oh well this is not nice to be here now. I had a chance to go to a conference in Spain—I went with my overnight bag, and while I was there the

government fell. Since the organization I was working for was kind of implicated—the Academy of Philosophy was actually funded by the Empress out of her personal purse in a very medieval way. She was actually a nice person, I always liked her actually.

At that point what did you do?

I'd been going to London quite a lot for five years to run the publishing program of the Academy of Philosophy. We did our printing in England. I'd be spending a month, two months, three months in London and then going back to Iran. So I moved to London, and I had worked for an outfit called the Festival of Islam, which put on the big Festival of Islam in London in 1975—I worked for them as a consultant on a number of projects, and they were still in existence. They were still trying to get something going in '78, so they hired me, but in the end nothing ever happened, so eventually I just gave up and left England and came back to America. By that time I was tired of being in self-exile too, I must say.

You were born and educated in America?

Yes, in fact I didn't finish college. I always said that the Orient was my advanced degree.

When did you first become aware of Hassan i Sabbah?

Well, we had a somewhat older friend when we were young hippies in New York who was much more sophisticated than us because he hung around with great jazz musicians. He himself was white, but he was an excellent jazz musician, and he was interested in sufism and Ismailism. And at that time we pretty much knew nothing about it, and he introduced us to some books on the subject.

And Burroughs consulted you in regard to The Western Lands?

No, I had sent him a typescript of my book *Scandal*, or at least parts of it that were about Ismailism—but I never did meet him. We had lots of friends in common though, like Ginsberg. I was quite surprised when he

mentioned it in the acknowledgments, and then when I read the book, I realized, yes, he had made some use of my material. And he told me that he had never read all the scholarship that I had read. But in fact he was working on legendary material in very creative, imaginative ways. That material has turned out to be fairly inaccurate, at least according to modern scholars like Daftary. I strongly recommend if you want to read the real book on Ismailism, it's by Farhad Daftary—*The Ismailis: their history and doctrines*, a big book, very scholarly.

*So in terms of your work as an artist and writer,
how do you feel about that kind of inaccuracy?*

Now there's a new tendency among scholars, which I can say I've been one in my small way, to look at this material not for its historical accuracy, but as a picture of what the society and literary tradition makes of a certain person and their heritage. So in other words, even the miracles are interesting to note because different kinds of things, different kinds of

figures have different sorts of miracles that kind of fit their personality in some way, and reveal something about them, not as actual historical figures but as still-living forces in the lives of the people who visit their tomb, or perhaps belong to the Sufi order they were a founder of or an important figure in. And I think this is very good—I like to know the legends about somebody, because that's what their followers believe, so it doesn't matter if it's true in the sense of history and archaeology, there's another truth. How did the meaning of this tomb, for example, change over time? What were the political implications of this cult? Who amongst the rulers were the patrons, and do we still hear about them, or are their names repressed because later on they became villains of history or something? So of course you have to approach the hagiographical material with a critical eye, but not just in this materialist way of saying this is all nonsense, but showing that—well how can I put it, that death is alive, that the past is the present in some way, an idea of course that vulgar historians have had

a tough time wrapping their minds around if they're brought up in the Anglo-American positivist or Marxist materialist traditions. And there's hardly anything else available to us until, to use the term loosely, the phenomenology of the '70s, when the idea began to come around. It certainly struck me very forcibly, that if you're going to study something, you study it on its terms, you study it as much as possible from inside it as well as outside—hopefully you get a balance of both that will be fully respectful of the tradition and yet at the same time accurate in terms of history and archaeology.

Did you feel there was a relationship between your life, and your earlier interest in magic, and the mythology of Hassan i Sabbah?

Well, there would be two ways to answer that. One would be to say what the legendary material meant—this is particularly important in studying the Ismailis, because the legendary aspect really does belong to the whole Oriental tradition and it's that Oriental tradition that

the early Western scholars like E. G. Browne, who was also an important introducer of this material, especially into the English language, the author of the great *Literary History of Persia*, the standard and classical and extremely delightful book on Persian literature—he was an English scholar, I guess his work extended into the 1920s. But he had written something quite early in his career about the Ismailis, about the Assassins, which had a lot of circulation. It's also naturally part of the Oriental tradition in general to think about the garden and the drug and the jumping off the side of the cliff, all that sort of stuff. It's as much of a legend out there as it became in the West through the writings of various people connected with the Crusades, who heard about it and even occasionally met with these strange Sectarians up in the mountains. When I moved to Iran I saw that Sufism was the thing, and I got much more interested in that. Then there was Henry Corbin who taught at the institute where I worked, and had a whole other much more sophisticated philosophical, mystical, scholarly

approach to Islamic heresies, to Sufism and to things even more extreme than that. Corbin was sort of a benchmark—once again there are many scholars who've gone beyond him now, to such an extent that a bit of reaction has set in—it's almost fashionable to dismiss Corbin now. But again the accuracy of what he was doing is not the issue to me, it's the sheer brilliant and imaginative scope of his thinking that he himself spun around this material. And as a result, looked at from the point of view of academic or standard Ismailology, it's quite eccentric, and was clearly that at the time also, but he got me interested in Ismailism again just by reading his books and at that point I made some friends in the Ismaili community, none of whom were Iranians by the way. They were all Indians or Pakistanis who had come to Iran for one reason or another, or they were in London at the Institute of Ismaili Studies which has published a great deal of important scholarship. In the last twenty years the whole field has changed again because the Aga Khan founded this institute, and hired all these

bright young people from India and Pakistan and England to turn out this new material. They must have published by now twenty or thirty books, including the book by Daftary, which has completely revised everybody's way of looking at the material.

So it's like something in a continual state of flux. It's been in a fascinating state of flux ever since I first got interested in it, and that's one of the reasons why it's continued to hold my attention—because the past keeps changing in this funny way, and it isn't only to do with shifts of attitudes. It's a very complex scheme of interwoven material. The fact that it's still a living religion, it's not a dead religion like Greco-Roman Paganism or something, which you can study under a bell jar, so even the religion itself is changing, and the Aga Khan says: Look, I'd like you to emphasize these scholars, please emphasize this or that aspect. You know sometimes he wants to be a little more Islamic because he doesn't want to be seen as a heretic, sometimes he wants to be a

liberal in the Islamic world. If you go and look at their websites I'm sure you'll find that the Ismailis are by no means enthusiastic about all this fundamentalist stuff—they've always been on the receiving end of that, and I'm sure, as much as they dare to, they're opposing that.

Did you experience fundamentalism much when you were in Iran?

No, that stuff was like nowhere. I mean we all knew about it, those people have always been around. There's always been a tendency amongst both the Shiites and the Sunnis towards this kind of narrowness of thought. But this huge international phenomenon, no, that just simply didn't exist. Sufism was what they were all involved in. Pakistan had a few such forces, in fact a couple of their political parties were already that way, but they weren't in power, and nobody expected them to be in power—they were nutcases, you know. They were not part of the great tradition, they were alien imports from Saudi Arabia—that's the way most people looked

at them. In fact if you really get below the surface today that's still the way they look at it. It's just the Saudis who come in with all this money, and money is hard to argue with. They even did it in Brooklyn—they've come in and thrown for a loop all the black Islamic groups in Brooklyn—either they sign up with the Wahhabis and get a lot of money, or else they're heretics. So the whole thing goes on in a fascinating way. Also I have to say that the latest thing is that everyone's noticed these strange similarities between Osama bin Laden and Hassan i Sabbah. Some people have gone much too far with this discovery, and it's led into some conspiracy theories and so forth which I think is a little silly. Hassan i Sabbah was just a manifestation of an eternal archetype in the Middle East. I'm sure if we studied it from this point of view we'd find that it's pre-Islamic—the bearded prophet figure who fights and lives in the mountains and is never caught, and this is part of the legend. This is why I predicted at the time that Osama would never be caught, because that archetype does

not die in the hands of his enemies, and often they disappear rather than die, so that they live on forever, like King Arthur.

What were the books that influenced you?

Before *Naked Lunch* came out, I was haunting the bookstores every day waiting for it to appear. Portions of it had been published and had been passed around in my circle. I might add that this circle is also the Moorish Orthodox Church, and related hippie institutions. In other words this was all feeding into our '60s psychedelic religion, which still had a vague existence in the world, the Moorish Orthodox Church and other related phenomena.

They were all involved with taking psychedelics...

Yes, these were all people who spent the '50s in various provincial towns—you know, lonely, wandering the libraries, and picking up a little of this and a little of that, and then coming together in New York or San Francisco, and saying, Gee, you were into that

too? I was into that. This was an experience I remember having about a lot of things, that oh my god there's *other* people in the world who like this stuff? Whether it was anarchism, or sufism, or all these things that for all we knew were completely dead in the world, right, and suddenly there's a whole generation of people who are intensely romantic about it. I mean I was virtually sent by my comrades to the East to discover what was going on. Whether there was in fact any sufism or Ismailism still being practised in the world, we didn't know, we weren't scholars—there were scholars who knew at the time but we didn't trust them, and they didn't trust us—we weren't speaking to them.

So it was like something that had to develop on your own terms?

Yes, because at college you weren't going to learn anything about it, until grad school, and besides that, I won't say the best of us, but a heck of a lot of us were leaving the Academy altogether—I certainly did. It was boring and

irrelevant, and what was going on in the street seemed much more interesting. In retrospect, let's say 1964 to '72 I think was about the most interesting intellectual period of the 20th century in a lot of ways, although as we all know, it didn't produce a lot of great art and literature. We were interested in life rather than artistic production, the same way that previous avant-gardes had been, and we weren't even an avant-garde. As far as we were concerned this was everyone. This was a revolution, this was a movement, a social movement, not just an artistic avant-garde. The new Left also influenced everybody's thinking in this respect, whether they were an active part of it or not. But the Academy was what we were leaving. And I hate it nowadays when everyone blames what happened to the Academy on us, on the hippies. We were against the Academy, we wanted to bring the whole thing down. What they're suffering through now is that we lost, right—there was a war and we *lost*, so okay *blame* the victims, that's what history is so good at doing. As far as I'm concerned what

we've got now is *not* the fault of the hippies, it's that hippies failed, you see, to me there's an important difference.

The rationale is to blame the victim for not being insightful enough.

Right. Now we have to take the blame for everybody's disillusionment with all these Oriental traditions we went over and discovered. We brought the gurus back, and the gurus went crazy and started abusing the disciples and buying Rolls Royces, and that whole thing is over now to a very large extent, or at least it's sorted itself out. Let's say during the '80s this was terrible. There were scandals in New York, all these Oriental paths were having a scandal, every year there would be some big scandal.

What was your relation to Timothy Leary—he had a big influence?

Oh yeah of course, he was a tremendous influence on everybody. I have a lot of respect for Leary, and I certainly wouldn't go back on

my gratitude to him directly for providing me with some of the most amusing experiences of my life, because I spent a lot of time up in Millbrook. I was only a 17-year-old hippie at the time, I wasn't hanging around with the famous people. I only met Leary once or twice, it wasn't until years later that he saw some of my writing, and I got briefly in touch with him and told him I was yet another private in the army of Generalissimo Leary, who had grown up and this is what I was doing now, and that was very sweet. That was a few years before he died. I think he was wrong about disseminating LSD to the millions and the masses, but hey I probably wouldn't have had it if it wasn't for that decision, because I wasn't any member of any elite. He made a mistake by publishing *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as *The Psychedelic Experience*—it gave rise to a whole generation of horror trips that nobody needed to have. I've always said what a pity he didn't realize the *Rig Veda* was a scripture that was actually written for people taking psychedelic drugs.

Maybe his delirious shamanism involved pushing buttons that were sometimes wrong.

He tried everything out, and he was much bolder than everybody else. Did you ever read his great autobiography called *Flashbacks*? By the way the cleverest autobiography title that anybody ever came up with, in my opinion. The guy had a terribly adventurous life—he deserves to be considered an epical figure.

Aldous Huxley was much more reticent about LSD and psychedelics.

His whole approach, his whole politics would've been much more along my taste, but if they had decided to keep it a secret and only hand it out to the elite it certainly wouldn't have been the '60s for whatever it's worth. But psychedelics ended up being too much for them, people didn't know how to handle them.

Is that to do with the urban environments in which they were taken?

Well that's an interesting thought, probably true. Like the back-to-the-land movement

being a direct result of people taking psychedelics in the city and going whoah, wait a minute, this is not right.

One of your poems actually mentions this, your 'Obit: Kathleen Raine'—'acid's not compassionate: who are those squid / these Undead in the Mall, Zombis dans le metro / one of the great EEK moments in psychohistory / 40 years later we'd still like to know.'

Yeah, I was making jokes about it there, and that's still true I guess. I like to say there's two ways of looking at it. You can say that either no particular drug has a particular content, it's all set and setting, to use Leary's phrase. Or you can take the position that the plants have an agenda—I think Terrence McKenna may have coined that phrase. Terrence actually came to believe this literally I think.

You knew him?

I knew him vaguely. I admired him tremendously and I always found him to be quite a delightful person, and in a lot of ways what he

said makes good sense. If you just take it with a grain of salt, even his idea of mushrooms as the source of consciousness is a very interesting one—I mean where does consciousness come from? And when he talks about how plants have an agenda, there really does seem to be some truth to that, if I can leave out a metaphysical interpretation of that. With ayahuasca, the way people feel about it is that it really takes you over and it does what *it* wants to do.

Aboriginal people take telepathy for granted and use it to live, but those things maybe no longer apply in urban, denatured environments...

Yeah. Well, Mircea Eliade in his book on shamanism proposed that the use of psychedelic plants by shamans had to be considered a late and decadent devolvement. And this idea was of course contested by people who studied shamanism in the '60s, who themselves had actually experienced psychedelics and felt that they were worthy of more respect. And in fact I read an interview with Eliade very shortly before his death in which he admitted he had

to revise that, and that he was now willing to entertain the idea that psychotropic plants were aboriginal with shamanism. So even the great traditionalist, and I would also point out, a right-wing fanatic, Eliade changed his view on this, as did a number of other people who kept an open mind through the '60s in the field of religion, like Huston Smith and people like that.

It's interesting the relation between drugs that are of natural, organic origin versus the John Lilly-type experience with ketamine, a Western chemical anesthetic, and yet they're still going perhaps to similar types of revelations.

Well there are those who dismiss this dualistic distinction between lab drugs and organic drugs. I'm not one of those people, but I will say it's a fuzzy distinction. Let's take LSD for example. It's true that it's synthesized, in the form that most of us experienced it, but in fact you start from an organic substance, or at least Hofmann started from an organic substance to make it in the first place, which was ultimately

derived from a fungus, ergot. So the argument between the appearance of psilocybin and the appearance of LSD in the '60s, this argument about organic versus synthetic is cloudy. So I don't want to say anything dogmatic about this, but my pendulum swings more towards the untreated plant preparations like psilocybe.

Regarding the desert landscape of the Middle East, there's the myth of the warrior king Gilgamesh killing the demigod Humbaba and destroying southern Mesopotamia's cedar forests.

Sure. Well I've always liked the idea of landscape shaping consciousness. Italo Calvino is at the other end of the Gilgamesh trajectory there, in his book *The Baron in the Trees*, about an 18th century baron eccentric who lives in the trees, and Calvino did a lot of research into forestry, and he figured out the last period in which someone could've moved across Europe without ever touching their foot to the ground, from limb to limb of great old-growth trees. It's his only full-length novel, a lot of people don't like it, but it's one of my

favorite books. I mean everyone knows that Islam is a religion of the desert. But some people have used the term pejoratively, to them that sounds bad, but to me it never sounded bad. I think deserts are very wonderful in their way. Monochromatic landscapes are fabulous because they're never monochromatic, they're actually incredibly polychromatic. There are subtleties of scale and color that occur in very apparently monotonous landscapes, like let's say the deforested parts of the Celtic world, Western Ireland, parts of Brittany, where everything is green and stone-colored and nothing sticks out. Somehow the landscape has become a living landscape even though it lost its Neolithic forest cover—now it has a new meaning.

The idea of travel—you've spent a lot of time traveling, but you wrote recently that 'only those who stay in one place and refuse the agitation and bodilessness of modern travel can hope to contact nature or humanity.'

Well that's somewhat personal. It's just that I

got old, I got tired of doing it. But it's not entirely that, I also have some ideological thoughts about travel, I always do, I've done so much of it in my life I'm always theorizing travel. And right now I see a difference between what it meant to travel in the '60s and what it means to travel now. We would have to talk about the changes in capitalism since 1989. So much has changed its meaning since then. 1995—we were joking about that—everybody I talk to about this agrees something came to an end in 1995. We can't quite put our finger on it yet, we need more hindsight to figure out what it was that died. But the internet was involved in it, and so was the fact that it took five years for the fall of the Berlin Wall to be fully felt. So round about '95 so many things came to an end on the psychic level—I can't point to any historical things, maybe there aren't any, but something psychic seemed to shudder to a halt there.

Is it some kind of chemical that now exists, or has been put into play? The new kinds of viruses

that are coming out of intensive farming...

That's got to be possible—well it all has to do with globalism, and global sickness is certainly one of the great metaphors of neoliberalism.

You've talked of the media and its ability to hurt people, and it's interesting this line between Hassan i Sabbah and current experiences—you were in New York when the World Trade Center came down.

It's become a cliché now to say that everything changed on that day, but my perspective is somewhat different, because first of all I've spent a lot of time living outside the US, and I think anybody else who had would tell you the same, that it wasn't such a big change to the consciousness of anyone who managed to move beyond the provincialism of being just a North American. Everything that changed, and of course it didn't change, was supposed to be America's consciousness of the world, but any possibility of that was buried immediately within three days of the incident by the militarist response, and the propaganda that went

with it. You could amuse yourself by going and looking in the *New York Times* three days after the event. The whole American soul seemed to be at stake all of a sudden, with fashion designers saying, I feel I've got to stop what I've been doing. That whole idiot cynicism of the '80s, which had completely infected media, the kind of fifth-degree referential consciousness of heterosexual camp, is the way I think of it. All those people felt guilty for three days. Then everyone went shopping again. The event had a logo designed for it, that always reassures everybody. And the *New York Times* changed its line. Whenever a logo is designed for television, that comes to symbolize everything for everybody. Once you focus both the conscious and the subconscious on these hermetic icons, you can redirect the way the mass will respond. This is brainwashing, there's no conspiracy here. In New York for three days suddenly something was seen that hadn't been seen before, but this is something that's known to every surviving person everywhere who had to suffer through war and terrorism. It's no big new thing. Amer-

icans just didn't get it, and we still don't get it. For three days we got it, but then, like I say, the negative, hermetic media consciousness slipped over everybody like a blanket of algae.

Phone Interview

Jacob Eichert

*JE: What initially attracted you to Islam?
What precipitated your move to the East in the
late sixties?*

Initially it wasn't Islam so much; it was sufism. That was a tradition I had come into contact with through the American Black Islamic world. I knew people who were involved in the Moorish Science Temple. I wanted to know more about it and there wasn't a great deal of information. There were simply no sufi groups practicing in the West that I was able to find. So that's why I decided to go to the East to see whether there was still anything going on in that world, which as it turned out there was.

Many people view this latest war in Iraq as a battle over resources. You said, "Islam offers a critique of the Image." On what level do you feel this is a war to instill a culture more sympathetic to the Image?

Are you implying, as opposed to the simple rip-off of resources there is something subtler and yet even more malignant going on, a sort of Burroughsian viral invasion of the Grey Room?

Yes.

I think that's undoubtedly true. One doesn't have to assign intentionality to these things; it's not necessarily a matter of a conspiracy theory. This is just the way our culture works. Our culture is to a certain extent imagophilic and Islam is to a certain extent imagophobic. But there are complexities within this dichotomy. In the West we've had iconoclasm, Puritanism, and very strong anti-image positions, not necessarily stupid by any means. Any position can be carried to a stupid extreme including the pro-image position. We resonate with this culturally and tend to feel that some kind of basic human right is being threatened when the image is critiqued.

As I have often tried to point out, we live in a prison of images. Anyone who analyzes ad-

vertising on television can quickly figure this out. I think a complete outsider would judge that most people are completely entranced most of the time by images, or to be more precise by a combination of image and word, which is a hieroglyph. The image by itself is not ideologized, as Walter Benjamin pointed out. But the image, let's say the photograph with the caption, is the perfect ideological prison: it's a closed system. It works on all levels from the subconscious to the superconscious.

I don't know who first came up with the term CocaColonization; I remember thinking it was very witty when I heard it in the late sixties. It meant and continues to mean a kind of viral colonization; a colonization through images, through advertising, through product, through commodity. This culture is very much associated with the West and specifically with America. Right now we're living under a regime that talks about the necessity for exporting our values, forcing them on other people whether they like it or not, as if they were children who needed to be given bitter medi-

cine for their own good. But what this medicine is of course is largely a culture of images. As such, when it appears invasively within a culture that fears (or at least distrusts) the image then great cognitive dissonances, clanging disharmonies, and cultural abysses open up.

In what ways do you feel the “Empire of the Image” has already manifested itself in the Middle East? I’m thinking of Iranian New Wave Cinema as a possible example. To what extent has their distrust of the image irrevocably abated?

That’s a complicated question. First of all, you’ve got a strong difference between Arab and Iranian culture. Arab culture, for whatever reason, has been much more aniconic than Persian culture. But even in Iran there is a taboo on painting the face of the Prophet. The taboo on the image in Islam is not a one-dimensional smashing of the image—a defiling of the beauty of art or freedom of the image. It’s a deep respect bordering on religious awe. There’s a legend that is somewhat widely accepted: when the Prophet returned to Mecca

and smashed the idols in the Kaaba, he allowed one image to remain. That image was the image of the Virgin and the Child. Nobody knows if it is true or not. But in any case, it is interesting that the Prophet himself made an exception to this ban on imagery, not to mention Islamic culture in general. So when you talk about Iranian cinema as somehow a change of consciousness, then you'd have to go back and talk about the passion plays of Tazia: one of the very rare forms of Islamic theater which was uniquely Iranian. It probably has a lot of explanatory value in understanding later developments of the plastic arts in Iran.

Perhaps your example is badly chosen. We might better ask for examples of the penetration of television into the Islamic world. This is something that has been going on just within my lifetime. I saw plenty of evidence of a deep sociological impact and change of consciousness. I've read recently somewhere an interesting observation: if evolution makes any sense at all then it would seem clear that human beings have not physiologically evolved to

communicate with each other at the speed of light. We evolved to communicate with each other at organic speeds, face-to-face speech or maybe riding somewhere on horseback in an emergency or whatever. Maybe human beings just simply aren't equipped to be as in-touch with each other through image as we are now. A lot of the clash of cultures these rascals talk about, which is to a certain extent illusory, can perhaps be attributed to a clash primarily on the level of the image. Of course, if you want a really hot-button example it is Abu Ghraib. I don't need to go into details as they are well and thoroughly discussed now—including by David Levi Strauss. He's been doing a lot of talking and writing about Abu Ghraib. I think Levi's comments are worthwhile because he is well grounded in the hermetic study of the image, which I think is key to understanding all this within the Western context.

In an article you wrote on the Evil Eye you said, "our entire social ethic [in the West] is rooted in envy." What does the West envy about Islam?

Yeah, that's a good question. I like that. First of all, I would think its vitality as a religion must be enviable to a lot of people. There is a real envy on the part of the Christian fundamentalists who see that they don't live in a society that monolithically belongs to a single tradition, the way the Islamic world does to a large extent. For all the talk you get from Western scholars and politicians about its decadence as a tradition, nevertheless there it still is in all its quasi-medieval thoroughness. Then there is the whole romantic thing, which never goes away. It's kind of a shadow of the Crusade mentality: this romantic love of the mysterious Orient. This isn't to be sneered at as something totally illusory. Romanticism actually is about something real—although it might not be about something visible, there is that distinction. I'd like to point out that if there is romanticism about the East in the West there is also an Oriental romanticism in which the East romanticizes itself with the rose and the nightingale and love. This tradition itself then played into the Western romantic tradition through the discov-

ery of the Orient that was going on around the time of Goethe, Sir William Jones, or William Blake for that matter. As you rang up I was just reading a reference to Blake's familiarity with a translation of the Bhagavad Gita. That whole Oriental view of itself as The Mysterious Orient is a cultural reality. It's tainted with envy but it's also tinged with love, even erotic love. So there is a cross eroticism between the East and West which is fascinating.

Why do you think this interaction is manifesting itself so destructively right now?

There would appear to be many reasons for that. The most obvious, to the point of being brutally obvious I would say, is the demise of Communism and collapse of the movement of the social in 1989. Suddenly there was no more historical dialectic—the one that defined the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—and there was just this triumph of global capital. But triumph is anything but pure and complete; there is still all of darkness and nothingness to be contended with here. Anyway, in order to mo-

bilize the military industrial blah blah there has to be an enemy. Islam is a very ancient enemy. It has had a vast tradition of being the enemy going back all the way to El Cid and the Crusades, and those images keep popping up. They're very much a part of the culture. The level of ignorance about Islam is just about as deep as it was in the time of El Cid, and a lot of the attitudes are the same. These attitudes were easy enough to whip up into a terroristic frenzy, into an image in fact. Of course Al-Qaeda and these kinds of people collaborate brilliantly with this scenario. It's as if they were part of a conspiracy; I'm not saying I believe that literally. But when you talk about image, it seems like the image of the Twenty-first Century is those falling towers. That was a brilliant manipulation of imagery—as Karlheinz Stockhausen got in a lot of trouble for saying.

When the war in Iraq first got underway US forces failed to protect museums and archaeological sites. It was estimated that tens of thousands of Mesopotamian artifacts were stolen or

damaged in the looting that followed.

There was a revisionist version of that story and to this day I have never really gotten it quite straight. What is your most recent source of information on all this?

That figure was from the October 2003 issue of National Geographic.

The time of the incident.

Right.

I've heard that the ten thousand or hundred thousand (or whatever the number) was exaggerated. It wasn't true, and it was secondary unimportant stuff. Now I don't know what to believe. Much more ghastly is the story of the Kabul Museum, which had the world's most important collection of Greco-Bactrian art—all completely gone. There are people trying to trace it around the world, and I think there has been a little success in locating where it went. I'm not an expert on this, but I have friends who are involved in desperately trying to find out what happened. That was a major disaster.

Let's assume that this revisionist story about the museums is true and it isn't as bad as they say, this is still holding back important archaeological research. Bob Black said civilization started in Mesopotamia and it looks like it's going to end there. It's all a disaster for serious knowledge. The library in Bosnia, for example, had a fantastic collection of Islamic manuscripts that was bombed to shit by the Serbs.

What I'm curious about in all these instances is the relationship of war to the erasure of history—meaning extracted from the landscape. Do you feel this is a deliberate tactic?

No I don't think so. Well, one can't be sure of course. It needn't be; let's put it that way. Shit happens! It's war. It's amazing how we have to reinvent the wheel every ten minutes these days.

You'd think we were a nation of total fucking virgins with all this Abu Ghraib stuff. I said to Levi, "It's like Americans never saw pornography before." Everyone is so shocked: "You mean people get tortured in war?" It's a bit naïve. Give me your question again.

The destruction of cultural identity as a tool of warfare.

The conscious level of this is perhaps less interesting than the unconscious level. I'm reminded of the Futurist Tommaso Marinetti. His manifesto proposed bombing all the museums of Italy to get rid of the heavy weight of the past dragging everything down. Basically I'm a preservationist and think this is a horrible idea. But I do understand that the past is a heavy weight, certainly nowhere more so than in Mesopotamia or maybe Egypt. There it all is. It's a kind of living rebuke to the present among other things. If you're an Imperialist the empires of the past were more glorious and if you're anti-imperialist the freedoms of the past were freer somehow. I'm not saying this is necessarily true; I'm saying this is perhaps how the subconscious reads history. Therefore, these outbreaks of barbarism are always so upsetting to cultivated and educated people for whom there is no shadow to the idea of culture or knowledge. But there is a shadow; the past is

a burden. So you have to keep that in mind especially if you are like I am, if you have basically decided that museums have their problems but they're better than no museums. This shadow has to be faced, it has to be understood, and it has to be answered. The kind of shallow liberal view of the situation, which sees things only in terms of knowledge equals good and ignorance equals bad, is two-dimensional.

You said, "If a genuine anti-Capitalist coalition is to appear in the world it cannot happen without Islam." What are the problems presented by this fact? I'm thinking along the lines of Foucault's support of the Iranian Revolution.

Yes, he got in a lot of trouble for that one. I suppose I could get in a lot of trouble for what I said. Where is that from; where did I say that?

It's from Millennium [1996].

Well that was then. I don't know what I would say now. Maxime Rodinson, in his book *Islam and Capitalism*, makes a very good argument against this (one that I was deliberately over-

looking when I made that comment). He was some brand of dissident Marxist. His analysis is pretty straightforward Marxiological, but it seems pretty sound: although Islam had certain aspects that could have potentially developed into an anti-capitalist movement, it didn't. His book was written before the Seventies, before the Islamic Socialism period. A lot of thinkers in the Islamic world, some of them crazy and some of them quite interesting, tried to bring out this socialistic potential in Islam—typically through things such as the ban on usury, the idea of charity as a principle rather than as a secondary aspect of religion, or the idea of the consensus of the community. There were people like Gamal Abdel Nasser or Kadafi. Then in Iran there were people like Ali Shariati, who did not succeed but were intellectually quite fascinating. But this period seems to be over. Once again it seems to be one of the great collapses that occurred around the collapse of the movement of the social in general. A great deal of the energy that went into those movements now seems to be pumped

into these quasi-fascistic phenomena like Islamic and Hindu fundamentalism. From a romantic point of view I guess I will stick with my statement, and as a romantic I will even support Foucault's opinion [his hope for the revolutionary potential of the Iranian Revolution during its infancy, as expressed in *Le Monde* and *Nouvel Observateur* in 1978-9] to a certain guarded degree. At least I won't come down on him like a ton of bricks the way a lot of his critics did. But on the other hand I'll say it is all very disappointing. There is no evidence that fundamentalism either has or can rise to this level of dialectical thinking. As long as fundamentalism is the leading edge, I don't know. I'm less sure of that statement now than when I made it. Let's just put it that way.

"Stain Your Prayer Carpet With Wine"

(Hafez)

Three Favorite saints of Shiraz
Abu Ishaq or Bus'haq the Gastrosopher
gourmet chef & sufi poet who always
wrote about mysticism as food—e.g.
I am the braised tongue in the casserole of gnosis
& so on for a whole *Divan*

Ruzbehan Baqli—great visionary rediscovered
by Corbin—I always think of him dining on
his roof with Angels dipping his bread
into oil of the Celestial Bear

Near mausoleum of Saadi
lies art-deco reconstruction tomb of Hafez
with modern but tasteful somber garden
where Classical Persian music was played
—greatest of all Persian poets—was he
wine-soaked libertine or big-time sufi
—some say both—arguments rage even today. Get
your fortune told with his *Divan*
on his gravestone for extra ju-ju.

Hafez opens shy Shiraz's gardens to
the orientalist's

or lover's gaze
Narenjestan the Orangery with its royal
Zand pavilion over-tiled with roses
or just some humble adobe-walled
sparse homely vegetable patch beside
the Ruknabad made famous by Hafez
tho it's a mere trickle where
one spreads the *sofreh* for a pic-nic
charges up the brass Russian samovar
with
hot coals
unpacks the culinary poem the gastrosophic
hegemonic
cuisine of the whole land
Shirazi food from its baskets &
jugs of wine covered
with snow
Cold yoghurt soup w/ raisins, cucumbers & fresh
herbs
served over chunks of
ice
Kebabs of lamb kidney & fat rolled in cracked
cumin cooked à la
barbeque
Mutton stewed w/ spinach & dried lemons
black with age
Chicken parts baked w/ layers of sour cherries in
cake of saffron butter

rice

Fried river fish served on candied rice

w/ raisins currants dried &

candied fruit

almonds pistachios & mutton fat

Roast duck w/ crushed walnut & pomegranate
sauce

Dozens of various pickles—Shiraz's specialties
supervised by grandmother alchemists

& incl.

black

garlic

followed by iced Khorassani melons,

three kinds of grapes, cucumbers
watermelon (w/ black seeds)
persimmons, & apricots

—tea—

but in certain circles (can't speak
for Hafez here) instead of all this food the
mangal would

be fired up & pipes that look like
African mojo gourd rattles on flutes would be
charged with pellets of "government" opium
(nice clean sticks suitable for slicing)
(buy them at the pharmacy if you've got the
permit)

hot coals held in tongs
each picnicker combusts
then sinks back on the
now-softened rug

earthbound but
airborn

One guest produces tiny four-string sehtar
another unwraps big tambourine

or

perhaps reed flute
& someone else begins to chant—Hafez.
You can't get away from him in Shiraz
Ubiquitous as the image & scent of
totemic

roses

roses a surfeit of roses both real & imaginal
all-night nightingales can produce
almost a sick headache of too much excess
instead of *excess in moderation* the
darveeshee ideal

Pro-Zoroastrian pro-Christian

(because they

make & sell

wine)

a certain kind of Persian dervish
comes very close to Fitz Omar's

Deist Epicurean
fortuitous
(mis)translation
of Khayyam's real & rather orthodox
brand of sufism
& proceeds Beyond Good & Evil
toward the goal of
blameworthiness
embraces all the idols
breaks the chains
of the Law
uses not only hemp & opium but
mysterious forms of haoma such as
Syrian rue
(organic red dye for your fez) mixed
w/
ephedra tea
—or the
famous Amanita fly-agaric
& others not yet known to modern science
but only to grandmothers
& perfumers.

The Will to Power is in large part concerned with the question of action, which is what makes it so much more valuable to us now, unfinished as it is, than many of Nietzsche's finished products. We don't need his precise experiments (or even his basic axioms) so much as we need his methodology. The sections on art and love seem particularly powerful discussions of the possible utility of certain illusions (let's call them "myths" to escape the usual connotations of futility connected with the word "illusion"). To take Nietzsche at his word is to envision a society of free spirits devoted to art and love and the transformation of the social element, simply because they—from the superabundance of life in them—find such play to be a challenging and joyful action.

from "Chaos, Eros, Earth, and Old Night"

Autonomedia



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